

# Jerusalem Crossroads:

*Portraits of a Family's Journey*



Howard B. Kaufman

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Cover:

*"Beautiful color drawing of Machne Yehuda section of Jerusalem"* as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by DALL·E 2.






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# *Dedication*

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*T*his book is dedicated to my mother, Elissa C. Kaufman, née Aliza Cohen, who was born in Alexandria, Egypt, grew up in Jerusalem, and who raised me and my siblings with care and devotion in Hollywood, Florida.



# מדינת ישראל

משרד ראש הממשלה  
גזר המדינה

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טו.ה.ט.

Government of Palestine  
Department of Immigration  
סימול מקווי: 82911  
Cohen Aliza

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מדינת ישראל



Cohen Aliza

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מזרח פרוי  
מזרח לובי  
כחובת  
ממשלת המנדט

מחלקה

א.ה.ה.

*Aliza's Naturalization file submitted to obtain citizenship  
from British Mandate Palestine in 1943*

# Preface

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Growing up during the 1950s and 1960s in Hollywood, a small town near Miami Beach, I was perplexed by a persistently recurring question: How did I end up in touristy South Florida - as both sides of my family hailed from faraway lands?



*Photo of beach in Hollywood, Florida circa 1965*

My paternal grandfather was ordained a rabbi at the Volozhin Yeshiva in Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while my maternal grandfather was a Jerusalem-born building contractor in Ottoman Palestine and later in British Mandate Palestine. What forces, opportunities, or happenstance brought me to this curious locale?

To unravel the mystery of my South Florida upbringing, I have stitched together pieces of family

history from an array of sources. My paternal family's story was relatively straight forward to research. The family came from Ukraine to the United States in the early 1900s as part of the great wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. Using information collected from many cousins and some primary research, a web site was created to tell and archive the story of my father's ancestors. See:

[https://web.archive.org/\\*/https://kaufmanfamilyproject.org/](https://web.archive.org/*/https://kaufmanfamilyproject.org/)

My mother's family story, the subject of this book, is more complex. Historical information was used to help explain why and how family ancestors migrated from Eastern Europe to Jerusalem in the 1840's, when basic transportation to the Middle East was very primitive. I was able to draw on direct family reporting, culling a wealth of family knowledge from numerous audio recorded interviews with relatives that I conducted years ago. I also discovered and delved into several written memoirs of relatives, revealing insights into key family decisions. For example, recollections of family members helped explain how the family survived in Alexandria, Egypt after they were exiled from Palestine by the Turkish government around 1915. Other conversations provided insight into the influences on the religious and career paths taken.

The trove of narratives, combined with historical background detailed in this book, is intended to shed light on the lessons learned from exile, immigration, the transformative power of education, and the struggles to carve out meaningful life paths during uncertain times. And, of course, this project has helped me figure out how I landed in Hollywood, Florida!

# A Guide to Photos and Illustrations

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A “photo” refers to an actual photograph from family members or archival source. Sources are listed in the Reference section.



Example:

*Photo of HIAS Office in  
New York City*

An “illustration”, though it might look like a photo, was created by image generation programs like Midjourney, and/or modified with an image processing application like Photoshop. The prompts used to generate illustrations can be found in the Reference section, along with other sources of information used to supplement first-hand accounts.

Example:

*Illustration of a young man  
resembling Yosef, traveling from  
Jerusalem to the US in 1924*



# Chapter 1:

## *Exiled to Alexandria*

---



*The Cohen family traveled overland from  
Jerusalem to Jaffa and then by US battleship to  
Alexandria, Egypt*

**E**lissa grew up in Jerusalem and naturally believed she was born there. Only as an adult did she learn from an older sister that in fact she was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1918, when the family was living there in exile.

The story of the family's exile was recounted by my Uncle Joe, the half-brother of my mother Elissa Cohen.

Well he was actually a little more than a half brother because Elissa's mother was also Joe's Aunt.

The Cohen family exile story begins with the turmoil caused by the Ottoman Empire entering World War I in 1914 on the side of Germany. People in Palestine with foreign citizenship, mainly Russian-born residents, had to choose between becoming Ottoman citizens or leaving the country. If they became Ottoman citizens, the men would surely have been drafted as laborers in work camps where life expectancies were short.

In 1914, the British and Turks approved a US plan to transfer Jewish refugees from Palestine to Egypt. The Middle East fighting had displaced thousands without food and shelter in Jerusalem. The State Department cabled details of the desperate conditions to the Turkish Ambassador Morgenthau who then organized relief efforts including the use of American battleships to evacuate refugees from Jaffa to Alexandria.

In 1915 the Cohen family consisted of Eliyahu (Elissa's father), Eliyahu's second wife Alta Devorah (Elissa's mother), and their five children. Early in 1915 the whole family left Jerusalem. They sailed to Alexandria aboard a US battleship, likely the USS Tennessee, which made multiple trips transporting Jewish refugees between Jaffa and Alexandria in 1914 and 1915.

Though Joe was only 10 or 11 years old at the time, he remembered that his father prepared some gold coins in advance in order to take some money with them. His father gave several coins to each family member and told everyone to hide the coins in their underclothes or stockings or shoes until they arrived in Alexandria.



The first leg of the trip, overland from Jerusalem to Jaffa, was difficult because the railway between the two towns was not operating, having been plundered for sections of metal rails by the Ottoman army. Consequently, all traffic between the two towns was restricted to poorly maintained roads. To make it even more challenging, finding a means of traveling was difficult because many of the available horses and carts had been commandeered by the Ottoman army.

Nevertheless, the Cohen family made it to the port city of Jaffa. American battleships were pressed into service and made multiple runs from Jaffa to Alexandria to transport the refugees into exile. All the passengers, including the elderly, young children and



*Photo of small crowded boats were used to ferry passengers to the waiting battleship*

parents with babies in tow, climbed into small crowded boats which ferried them, along with their meager possessions, out to the large ship anchored offshore. Once on board, the refugees registered for the trip and listed their family name and city of origin.



*Photo of refugees registering on board  
the USS Tennessee in Jaffa in 1915*

The trip from Jaffa to Alexandria took only one night with everyone lucky enough to have made it on board sleeping out on the ship's deck.

A meager breakfast was served in the morning and over 60 years later, as Joe recounted his trip onboard the warship, he remembered that he spilled his hot cocoa while drinking it and was frightened of being scolded, but fortunately no such reprimand occurred.

When the family arrived at Alexandria, the process was reversed and the refugees clamored down shaky stairs to small boats waiting to ferry them to the quay and on to an uncertain future in exile.

The Cohen family was among 12,000 Palestinian Jews (out of a total population of 85,000) who left Ottoman-controlled Palestine for Alexandria in 1914 and 1915. Some had been rounded up and forcibly exiled, while others assessed the situation and left before Ottoman citizenship was imposed upon them.

With the first Palestinian refugee arrivals in Alexandria, Egyptian Jews formed a committee called



*Photo of Jaffa refugees  
disembarking from the USS  
Tennessee, 1915*

The “Assistance Committee for Palestine and Syria” to collect and distribute funds to help feed and shelter the refugees. The funds came primarily from wealthy donors living in Egypt and abroad. The British-Egyptian authorities also provided some resources and created refugee encampments for those who did not have the means to support themselves.

By 1918 there were two refugees encampments in Alexandria of about 1,500 refugees who did not have a means of support. Each camp had a school, baths and a synagogue, but the living conditions were difficult.

Fortunately, using money they had smuggled out of Palestine, the Cohen family was able to rent an apartment in the Jewish Quarter. Joe and his older brother Natan were enrolled in a Heder, the traditional Hebrew school for young boys.

But there was no source of income so the family had to scramble to find some kind of work. Initially Joe and Natan both put on peddler’s chests in the afternoons after school was over. They sold cigarettes, chocolates and postcards to British service men who came into town on leave.

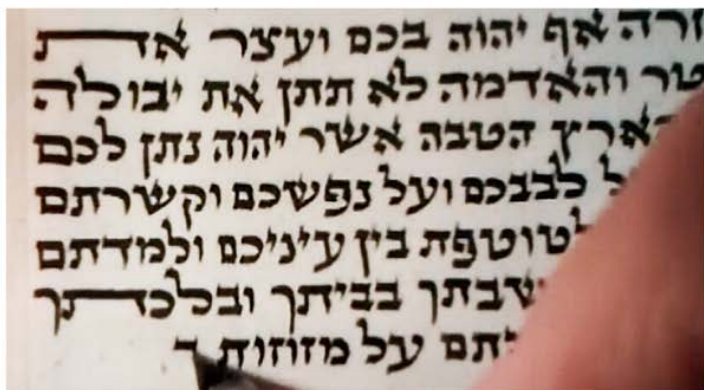
Eliyahu created a make-shift kiosk for a money-exchange business in the doorway of a store. He rented the doorway space and set up a small chest and exchanged British money for Egyptian money, making a small commission in the process. He also sold higher priced goods, like watches, when he had the opportunity to do so.

Soon a factory opened up for manufacturing mezuzahs and tefillin which were sold in the United States. Joe and Natan were both able to get part-time jobs in the factory and hung up their peddler’s chests to become “Sofreem.”



*Illustration of young boy peddling goods  
to servicemen on an Egyptian street*





*Example of the Hebrew stylized text used for writing prayers placed into tefillin and mezuzahs*

A sofer is a calligrapher who writes Hebrew prayers with pen and ink on parchment in a very prescribed style.

Joe and Natan were trained for about two weeks and then joined the ranks of nearly 200 sofereem who sat and wrote out prayers on parchment in a large room for hours at a time. An experienced sofer could write parchments for 20 mezuzahs in one day. Joe considered himself a “slow poke” for he could only write enough for 12 in a day. Joe and his brother worked as sofereem for the rest of their stay in Alexandria.

With the backing of a wealthy donor, Eliyahu soon opened a subsidized grocery store for the Jewish Palestinian refugees living in Alexandria. The donor, Lazar Slutzkin, was a Russian immigrant whose wealth was built from a successful garment business in Australia. Slutzkin and his family moved from

Australia to Palestine in 1908, yet they too were forced into exile in Alexandria.

It's not clear whether Eliyahu met Lazar in Alexandria or if they knew each other from Jerusalem, as they both had some association with the Etz Chaim Yeshiva in the Zichron Moshe section of the city.

In any case, according to Joe, they both had "the same kind of beard," which meant they shared similar religious customs and practices.



*Photo of Lazar Slutzkin*

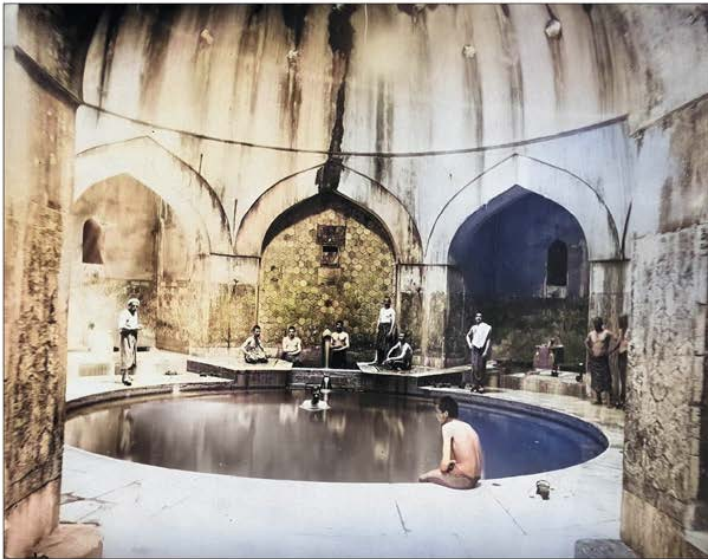
One Friday morning, Eliyahu was invited to the Slutzkin estate on the outskirts of Alexandria to discuss ways Eliyahu might help with Slutzkin's charitable giving. They ended up agreeing on a plan to open a grocery store where everything would be sold at cost, in a location accessible to the Jewish refugees living in Alexandria. Eliyahu would be paid to manage the store.

Eliyahu left the meeting with 200 Egyptian pounds in cash, roughly \$15,000 to \$20,000 in 2023 dollars. With this money he was commissioned to find a store to rent, to make a deposit, to secure a lease, and to stock the grocery store with food.

A series of events happened after Eliyahu left the Slutzkin estate and Joe told the following story with a twinkle in his eye.

*"My father came home a very happy man; he has a position now, a respectable position. He is going to manage the business for the Slutzkins, after all its good to be friends with such wealthy people. Actually, he never had anything beyond that from them, but that's what it was.*

*So that day my father felt good and on that Friday afternoon he said to me and my brother Natan, 'Let's go to the Turkish bath this afternoon, we will enjoy ourselves at the Turkish bath!' Going to the Turkish bath is what we did for enjoyment. That day we*



*Photo of the Turkish bath of Yeni Caplica, Turkey, similar to the Turkish bath in Alexandria in 1915.*



went and it was no big deal and afterwards we returned home to get ready for Shabbos.

On every Shabbos, the routine was very similar. In the afternoon after morning prayers, my father would read the Tehilem (an anthology of individual Hebrew prayers) and then read the parsha of the week (the portion of the torah read that week). He might have some tea and take a nap, but he would always return to studying and praying before the evening arrived.

That evening, after Shabbos was over, he went to look for something in his weekday coat. We did not have any closets, we just had a part of the room where a curtain sectioned off some pegs on the wall where we hung our coats. So my father went to this section and looked through the pockets of his coat. In one of his pockets he felt something hard and pulled it out wondering, 'what is this?' And it was the 200 pounds!

He called in Alta, his wife and the rest of the family and said, 'A miracle has happened!' What was the miracle? 'Imagine,' he says 'You know yesterday, I got 200 pounds from Slutzkin. I forgot all about it after I had put the money in my pocket. Then we went to the Turkish bath and I hung up my clothes in the public room on a nail out in the open. The place was full of "ganaves," thieves, full of thievery. Everybody knows when you go to the Turkish bath you don't leave anything in your pocket because if you leave anything you will not have it when you



*The train route taken by the Cohen family in 1919  
to return to their former home in Jerusalem*

*come back. If you leave a torn jacket you will find it but not anything more valuable.' He said, 'Imagine, I had the 200 pounds, I forgot completely about it, and there it was hanging for 3 hours. That's a miracle. Children, I see in this 'Etzba Eloheem' (a sign of divine intervention, literally 'the finger of the Lord'). I think from now on He is going to be with us and we will see no more trouble. This is indeed a good sign!'*

One could argue it was a good sign for the family. At the end of 1915, another boy was born into the family and they named him Arie Leib. In December of 1918, the last addition to the family was made with the birth

of my mother Aliza, later known as Elissa. That brought the number of children to seven. Eliyahu successfully started and ran the subsidized grocery store. He even took on a nephew as an assistant. So between Eliyahu's salary as a store manager, and the money the boys made as sopherem, they provided an adequate income for the family.

In 1918 a repatriation committee was formed to start planning for the Jewish refugees in Alexandria to return to Palestine. Funds to assist with repatriation were gathered, once again, from wealthy donors.

In 1919, Eliyahu, Alta and their seven children, two of them still babies, left Alexandria and returned to Jerusalem by train, via Cairo. Elissa's family was quite fortunate that they still maintained ownership of their family home, on 25 Adler Street, in Jerusalem. In 1919 tenants were living in their home, so they rented an apartment until the lease ended, at which time they moved back in.

Stories of exile are narratives of survival. This was certainly the case for Elissa's family. From the start, with smuggling gold coins hidden in the family's clothing, to street peddling and children working long hours after study to make a living, the family found ways to survive their exile in Alexandria.

The Cohen's had several advantages over less fortunate people in exile around the world. First, they could afford to rent an apartment, instead of finding themselves forced into a refugee encampment. Second, they could fall back on a community that readily accepted them - resident Egyptian Jews and fellow exiled Jews from Palestine. This meant Joe and his brother Natan could eventually find jobs handwriting prayers for Tefillin and Mezuzahs. And Eliyahu could,

after a while, earn a salary managing a charity-supported food store, funded by a similarly exiled Palestinian Jewish philanthropist.

Exile naturally creates a longing for one's homeland. For Elissa's family, unlike many refugees around the world, their exile did come to an end and they were able to return home. After four years living in Alexandria they returned to Jerusalem and resumed their former lives centered on religious community, study, and enterprise.

## Chapter 2:

### *A View to Die For*

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**E**lissa had six generations of family ancestors buried on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem.

At least three sets of ancestors traveled to Jerusalem, from the town of Brest in the Russian Empire, in order to be buried in Jerusalem. They believed, according to Elissa's brother Mordechai, that when the messiah



*A photo of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives cemetery*

arrived they would “rise up immediately and they will not have to travel through all the Earth to come to Israel.” In other words, they believed they would be present when the messiah came to be reincarnated and to return to Jerusalem.

When Mordechai passed away in 1998, he was the sixth generation to be buried on the Mount of Olives.

Elissa and her siblings did not know many stories about life in Brest, called "Brisk" in Yiddish. However, some clues from the family's life in Jerusalem can be used to put together a story of what life was like in Brest and to understand the family's path to Jerusalem. Three central themes help explain their way of life: the driving influence of religious leaders, philanthropy as a key means of support, and the role of women contributing to the financial support of the family.



*Map of the Russian Empire in the 1800s.  
Brest is on the Western edge of the Pale of Settlement.*



Brest was a center of Jewish thought and culture for centuries and was a key city in the “Pale of Settlement.” The Pale of Settlement was the only area of Russia in the 19th century where Jews were allowed to live. The name for this region came from the Latin word for “stake” (*palus*), as in a stake used to indicate a boundary of a fixed territory or district under a particular jurisdiction. The area of the Pale of Settlement included the current-day countries of Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, much of Ukraine and parts of Poland.

In the Pale, the common reference for the region, Jews were forbidden by law to own their own land, so many Jews became tailors, bakers, peddlers, or small store owners. These types of occupations were held by Elissa’s female ancestors in Brest, and in nearby Kobryn while her male ancestors were “Torah scholars.”

Elissa’s family’s story is tied to a well known Lithuanian rabbi named the Vilna Gaon and his followers.

The Vilna Gaon was a celebrated and influential rabbinical figure who was born in what is now Sialiec Belarus about 65 miles from Brest.

The Gaon married and had eight children with



*The Vilna Gaon, who lived between 1720 and 1797.*

his first wife, Chana, who supported the family on her own. Until her death in 1782, Chana opened and ran a small store and reared all the children while her husband devoted himself entirely to his studying, writing and practicing religion.



*New Year greeting card with a 100-rouble credit ticket featuring an image of the Vilna Gaon. Vilnius, 1907*

The Gaon became a recognized Jewish religious leader in Vilna. He never held an official post in the town, and in fact never held any official role either as a rabbi of a synagogue or as a judge in a religious court or as a head of a yeshiva. He did eventually receive a stipend from the city of Vilna.

Despite the absence of any official title or position, the Gaon and his followers had a strong influence on Jewish history in the 19th century. In fact, there were three areas of the Gaon's influence that had an immediate effect on the lives of Elissa's ancestors as well as on her immediate family. These include:

- the recognition of the importance of secular study;



- the strong opposition to the fledgling Hasidic movement and;
- the encouragement of immigration to *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, in Ottoman Palestine, as exemplified by the subgroup of his followers, called "*Perushim*," who immigrated there in small groups.

The Vilna Gaon was reportedly knowledgeable in secular sciences, which he saw as an aide to better understand religious texts. He was said to have studied grammar, geometry, geography, astronomy, and other subjects. As we will see in Chapter 6, secular education for girls was acceptable in Elissa's family and the origin of this acceptance can be traced back to the inclusion of nonreligious subjects in the studies of the Vilna Gaon.

At the same time, the nascent Hasidic movement started in the 18th century by rabbi Baal Shem Tov, tended to emphasize prayer over learning, with an emphasis on mysticism and fervent worship.

The Gaon and his followers, mostly Lithuanian Jews, put up a strong resistance to the Hasidic Jews who they saw as "heretics" who had broken away from true Judaism. The Gaon's followers became known as the "*Mitnagdim*," Hebrew for "opposition," based on their opposition to Hasidic Jews.

The Mitnagdim, in turn, formed a separatist subgroup called the "*Perushim*" (from the base Hebrew word *parash*, meaning "to separate"). This group wanted to separate themselves from what they saw as the religious impurities of the society around them in Europe. Some of the Perushim, starting in the early 1800s, decided to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael, in Ottoman Palestine. Elissa's great, great grandparents

were in one of the later waves of Perushim immigrants arriving in Jerusalem in 1847.

But before tracing the path of their arduous journey, it is possible to use what we know about the Perushim to paint a picture of their lives in the Pale of Settlement before they immigrated.

Elissa's paternal great great grandparents were from the town of Brest (or *Brisk* as it was known in Yiddish) or from the nearby smaller town of Kobryn, which was in the Grodno district but still considered a suburb of Brest. Their names were Yehuda Leib ben Moshe HaCohen and Feiga Nacha bat Eliyahu. They were born around 1794, a few years before the death of the Vilna Gaon in 1797.

Informative details about Yehuda Leib were included in a 1849 Montifiore "Census of the Jewish inhabitants of the Holy Land" conducted shortly after he and his wife arrived in Jerusalem (see summary in the Appendix). Yehuda Leib's occupation was listed as "Torah Scholar", and his "Kollel" or funding organization (more on this later) was listed as "Perushim." From these two details we can surmise a great deal about their lives before they immigrated.

As a follower of the Vilna Gaon and a full-time Torah scholar, we know that Yehuda Leib's youth would have been entirely centered around his Jewish education with a very prescribed curriculum. It would have started with attending a "Heder," a private one-room school in the home of a teacher who was paid by his parents. He would have started to learn to read Hebrew around the age of three in order to first read prayer-books - and also to help free up his mother for other household and work responsibilities. Then he would move on to study the five books of the Hebrew bible,



*Painting of a one-room Heder with a Melamed (Teacher)  
and several students, by Isidor Kaufmann*

or “Humash,” often discussing related commentaries in Yiddish originating from a medieval rabbi named Rashi. Next would go to a more advanced heder for the

study of Talmud, a record of the rabbinic debates on the teachings of the Torah from the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> century. After Bar-Mitzvah age (13), Yehuda Leib would have gone on to study in a communal Yeshiva in the synagogue's beth midrash (study hall), with a local rabbi or with a private tutor, if his family could have afforded it.

As a young scholar he would have been an attractive catch for Feiga Nacha and they were likely married in their late teens or early twenties.

Feiga Nacha would have had a much different youth without nearly as an intense formal education. However, she would have likely learned to read Yiddish, either at a girl's heder run by a "Rebbetsin" (a Rabbi's wife) or at home from her mother.

She would have studied a common compilation of bible stories, commentaries, and folktales called the "Tsene Rene" and also learned a Yiddish collection of prayers, mostly said by woman, called "tekhines."

Though learning the traditional Jewish household tasks from her mother, like koshering meat and baking bread, must have certainly been emphasized, Feiga Nacha could have also learned one or two European languages from a tutor, especially if she came from a rabbinic family, which is likely.

Whether in anticipation of starting and running a shop, or though on-the-job training, she also would have had to learn practical things like counting and calculating, as well as conversing in Polish or Russian in order to work with traders to supply her shop.

After marrying Yehuda Leib, Feiga Nacha would have followed a common Eastern European practice, especially among the Gaon followers, of the women caring for the children and running a small store to



*Illustration of a young Feiga Nacha studying at home  
with her mother*

support the family while her scholar-husband studied all day.

With children to raise, a shop to run, and Jewish holidays to cook and prepare for, Feiga Nacha's busy life can be well imagined. Preparing for the Sabbath and the main Sabbath meal was a high priority. When the Sabbath meal was finished the family would stay around the table and close out the meal singing songs or "*zemirot*" which were festive hymns sung in Hebrew or Yiddish. On Sunday, the weekly cycle would begin again.



*Illustration of an older Feiga Nacha in a shop she likely started and operated to support her husband and family*

Several years before the Vilna Gaon died in 1797 he had tried, but failed, to immigrate to Eretz Yisroel. Nevertheless, some of his followers were inspired by his vision and motivation to immigrate and completed the difficult trip to Ottoman Palestine themselves.

The motivation of these followers to immigrate was entirely spiritual and religious. They saw living in Eretz Yisroel as a commandment to be fulfilled that would make them closer to the gates of heaven. That in turn would make them more influential in bringing about redemption and the advent of the messiah. Since they would be praying for their Eastern European brethren they would be worthy of their financial support.

There were three initial waves of immigration: the first in 1808 and two more in 1809. By the end of 1809 over 500 Perushim, all followers of the Vilna Gaon, had finished the grueling 2,000 mile journey.

The first group left from the town of Shklow, in current day Belarus, about 350 miles to the northeast of Brest. The second group left from Vilna, in current day Lithuania about 200 miles north of Brest. And the third group also left from Shklow. It took the group from Vilna seven months to complete the journey. The voyage was deemed to be so dangerous that some husbands temporarily left their families behind and also granted their wives conditional divorces to allow them to remarry, without legal complications, if they were not heard from again.

Elissa's great great grandparents would have followed a route in 1847 similar to the route of the Perushim travelers 40 years earlier. From Brest they would have traveled overland by a horse drawn wagon to Odesa, a port located on the Black Sea. On this leg of the trip they would have stayed in Jewish-run roadside inns along the way.

From Odesa, they traveled by boat to Constantinople in Turkey, now known as Istanbul. From Constantinople, they took passage on another boat, hugging the coast of Turkey and sailing to the port city of Acre. From Acre they traveled overland to Jerusalem. Throughout the whole trip they faced the threat of being robbed by bandits, encountered delays caused by primitive roads in disrepair, and experienced difficulties in booking passage by sea.



*Illustration of how Perushim families would have traveled overland to Odessa (above) and by sea from Odessa to Constantinople to Acre (below)*







*The most likely route taken by Elissa's great great grandparents from Brest to Jerusalem in 1847*

Before the Perushim traveled to Jerusalem they had been warned by the Vilna Gaon that a major obstacle to settling in Eretz Israel was the difficulty of finding any means of making a living. As a result, fund raising drives in their cities of origin became their primary means of support.

The support was organized by an organization called a "*Kollel*" (Hebrew for a "gathering" or a "collection" of scholars). Initially, the term was used to refer to a community of European Jews that had settled in Eretz Yisrael with their own support system tied back to their home city or town, for example the Perushim Kollel with ties back to Vilna and Brest. The Kollel was an umbrella organization that addressed all its members financial and social needs. It took responsibility for interfacing with Turkish authorities regarding governance and taxation of its Jewish members. It also led the collection and disbursement of funds from Eastern European Jews. Eventually, the term came to refer to the financial support of Jewish scholars who were paid a stipend to study full time.

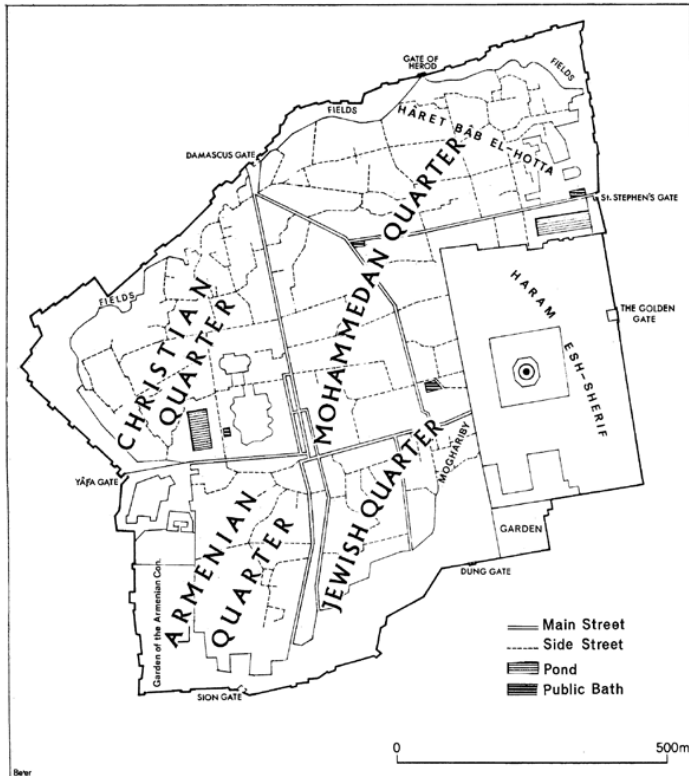
In Eastern Europe during the 19th century the "pushke" came into use as a means of efficiently collecting donations for charitable causes of a particular community. The pushke was a small box or container with a slit on the top for inserting coins. Pushkes were distributed through synagogues to private homes and periodically collected. This was one way of collecting funds in Eastern Europe to be sent as support for the Perushim Kollel in Jerusalem.



*Photo of a  
"Pushke" box*

Another source of funding was direct fundraising at Eastern European synagogues by direct representatives of the Perushim Kollel.

When Yehuda Leib and Feiga Nacha completed the long, perilous journey from Brest to Jerusalem in 1847, there were only about 6,000 Jews living in the Old City of Jerusalem, primarily in the Jewish Quarter, supported primarily through a network of Kollects.



*Map of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1857*

Living conditions in the Old City of Jerusalem were difficult, with limited resources. Water had to be carried from public wells or purchased from vendors. The narrow, winding streets were lined with small cramped houses, often with several families sharing a single dwelling amidst poor sanitary conditions.

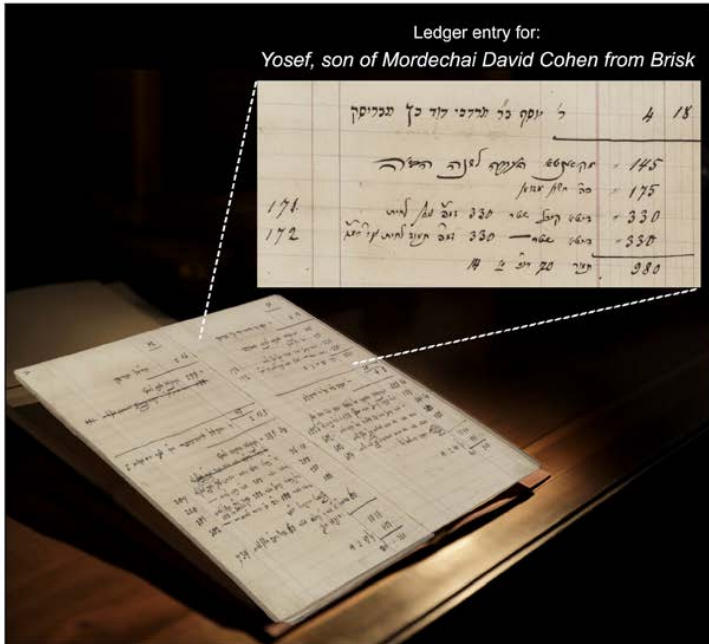
Yehuda Leib and Feiga Nacha would have transplanted, from Brest to Jerusalem, their prayer services, religious rituals, dress, language, and educational system and continued their Perushim-based lifestyle.

Daily life would have been defined by the rhythm of religious schedules and holidays. Prayer services were held (with required attendance of all males over 13 years of age) each morning and late afternoon. For full-time Torah scholars like Yehuda Leib, there were all-day study sessions.

Feiga Nacha likely contributed to the household income by running a shop or possibly making and selling wine, as later her daughter and granddaughter did. As a full-time Torah scholar, Yehuda Leib received a stipend from the Perushim Kollel as did his son, Mordechai Dovid and his grandson Yosef.

Mordechai Dovid was born in Brest with his birth date listed inconsistently in different Montifiore censuses as 1819, 1826 or 1830. Similarly, the date of arrival to Eretz Yisroel, was listed inconsistently as 1847 (which would have been with his parents), 1850 or 1860.

Mordechai Dovid's son Yosef was also born in Brest in 1845 and immigrated with his parents as a young child, and his date of arrival is listed inconsistently as 1848 or 1854.



*Photo of ledger entry shown with an illustration of the Ledger of Accounts of the Perushim in Jerusalem 1876-1879.*

Mordechai Dovid and Yosef were also full-time Torah-scholars and both were listed as recipients of stipend funds in a 1879 ledger book kept by the Perushim Kollel, an original copy of which is archived at the National Library of Israel. A copy of the ledger pages shows distributions of funds (likely irregularly) in the amounts of 145 Turkish gerush (~\$6.38) to 330 Turkish gerush (~\$14.52).

The following costs (taken from a US State Department report from 1885) illustrate how these



*Photo of a street scene in the Old City of Jerusalem  
in the 19th century*

meager amounts would have had difficulty covering living expenses.

Daily living expenses for a five-person family in  
Palestine in 1885:

Bread, 16 cents

Oil, 4 cents

Lentils, 8 cents

Vegetables, 8 cents

Charcoal, 4 cents

**Total: 40 cents / day or \$2.80 / week**

Nearly all the Jews of Jerusalem received charity at that time, with two-thirds of them dependent on these funds as their main source of income, according to the same US State Department report. Since the stipends were so limited, the Jewish women who were married to full-time Torah-scholars were motivated to find jobs to add to their family income. The most common occupations these women took on were shopkeepers, winemakers, seamstresses, maids, and midwives.

Elissa's grandmother, Sarah who was known as "Soreh de Briskeh", or Sarah from Brisk, fit this work profile well, as she worked at various times as a shopkeeper, winemaker and midwife.

Sarah immigrated to Jerusalem as a young teenager and later married Yosef Cohen, (Feiga Nacha's grandson), who had immigrated earlier as a young child with his parents. Many of Elissa's relatives told stories about Sarah.

A niece of Elissa's, named Aliza Argov, told her version of Sarah's story in a radio interview, summarized as follows:



**Interviewer:** A name that appears on one of the gates in Mea She'arim (a neighborhood in Jerusalem), is Sarah de Briskuer. What do you know to tell us about her?

**Aliza Argov:** I am her great granddaughter. Eliyahu Cohen was my grandfather and Shoshana, his eldest daughter, was my mother. That's how I know a few stories – through my mother. I did not know Sarah, my great grandmother personally, or at least I can not remember much about her from my very early childhood.

She was apparently a very special woman and extraordinary for her time. She immigrated to Israel as a young teenage girl in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with her uncles. And they all came from the town of Brest [Brisk in Yiddish]. And thus they named her, in a Yiddish dialect, Soreh de Briskeh, meaning, Sarah from the city of Brisk.

I was told that they endured great hardships on the way and arrived in very grave conditions to Jerusalem.

At first, they lived in the Old City of Jerusalem but with the founding of a new neighborhood, called Mea She'arim, they moved and became one of the first settlers of



*this neighborhood. Sarah's husband, Yosef Cohen, was a wise student (another term for a Torah-scholar) and was also involved with public affairs. And it is possible to say, the financial support of the entire household was laid upon her shoulders, it became her sole responsibility. She really was an extraordinary woman. She conducted commerce in wine, and it is told that she manufactured the wine herself in her winery.*

**Aliza Argov:** *Well, maybe not in a large winery, but in a store she ran in her own house, which was adjacent to the store, right at the entrance to the neighborhood. She manufactured the wine with her own hands and made oil as well, and used it in trade.*



*Illustration of Sarah in a small winery*

*It is interesting that she also had the knowledge to be a midwife, and many of the region's residents were her children, meaning to say that she assisted at their birth. An interesting story is that also Arabs, belonging to the Arab aristocracy, came to ask for her help regarding childbirth. It was told that the husbands would come, to her door steps, and would call her: "Alsayida Sara, Alsayida Sara" - "Mrs. Sara, Mrs. Sara, come help my wife give birth." And she would immediately harness herself and travel to the surrounding villages to help in birthing.*

*You brought up the gate. And she was so respected, and so adored, that they named the first gate in the neighborhood after her, when coming from Kings of Israel's street (Malchei-Israel St.). It was named after her. In Yiddish they say "Soreh de Briskeh Niftayer" meaning "the gate of Sarah from Brisk".*

*My mother also told me that there was a rabbi, Rabbi Diskin, and when my great grandmother would come to visit him, his wife, the rabbi's wife, would say: "look, please look, here comes Sarah", and he would get up from his seat, and go out toward her to greet her. So much, the rabbi treated her with so much respect.*

*I: What was the reason for that respect? Because of her help with birthing?*

**Aliza Argov:** *No, because she was a persona, an outstanding persona with an extraordinary character. A persona, doing at the same time public work, as well as providing for her family and financially supporting her household.*

Elissa's grandmother, Sarah de Briskin, passed away in 1936 and is buried next to her husband Yosef Cohen on the Mount of Olives.



*Illustration of the gate of  
"Sarah from Brisk"*

Sarah's life was filled with challenges. Her resourcefulness allowed her to meet her biggest

challenge of supporting her husband while raising a family; making a living from whatever businesses she could cobble together to generate a modest income.

Sarah's travails appear to be similar to the hardships endured by family members who came before her. Sarah and Yosef's grandparents, motivated by their religious beliefs, embarked on a 2,000 mile perilous journey over land and sea. They faced many adversities only to arrive at a very poor country with limited access to secular education, healthcare and few means for earning a reliable income.

Today their odyssey seems almost unfathomable and can only be explained by their deep belief in the benefits of living on sacred soil and the convictions their efforts would quicken a messianic salvation. The cold reality of life in 19th century Ottoman Palestine required quite a struggle to eke out a living, to build out and grow a community in a relatively hostile environment, and to create a system to collect and channel charitable funds to Palestine from abroad to ensure their own survival.

The descendants of Sarah and Yosef embarked on different paths for themselves and their families. We will explore some of their life choices in the following chapters.



*Illustration of a Mea Shearim street scene  
in the early 1900s*



## Chapter 3:

### *In on the Ground Floor*

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*Eliyahu managed the building of the Bikur Holim Hospital shown under construction in this photo from ~1924.*

**E**lissa's father Eliyahu was a builder. When Elissa was a child, it was a good time to be a builder in Jerusalem. The Old City was densely packed and a new city was rapidly growing outside its walls. Why Eliyahu chose to be a builder, instead of a full-time Torah-scholar, is not obvious. Clues from a variety of family stories help explain why he chose this path.

Eliyahu was born in 1879 in Jerusalem to Sarah de Brisken and her husband Yosef Cohen. Eliyahu was the



youngest of four children. His older brother was Avraham Yaakov and his older sisters were Hannah and Menneh.

As was common, Eliyahu went to a Heder and then to a Yeshiva, where he studied rabbinic literature and Talmud. At a young age he was sent to Vienna, by himself, for treatment for his eyes. Seeing Vienna as a youth surely made an impression on him about life in Europe that must have stayed with him as he matured.

It is not clear where Eliyahu studied in his youth, but his brother Avraham Yaakov, according to a eulogy to Avraham, studied with two leading Perushim rabbis: the "Rabbi of Brisk" (also known as Rabbi Diskin) and the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Salant. It is likely that Eliyahu studied under these two rabbis as well.

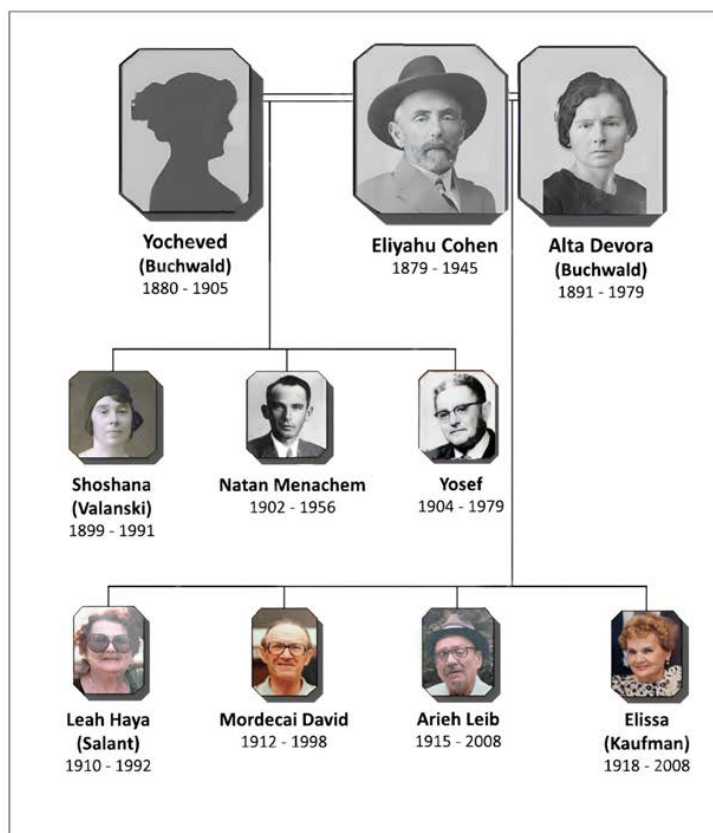
Around the time Eliyahu married his first wife Yocheved in 1898, at age 19, he would have faced an important life decision, to continue his life as a full time Torah-scholar, or to pursue an alternative path. He decided to earn a living by his own means and started a career in building contracting, a profession his older brother Avraham likely knew about as Avraham was managing the development of new areas in Jerusalem.

Yocheved was the daughter of Natan and Friede Buchwald who were originally from Bratslav (Breslov), Ukraine. Eliyahu had three children with Yocheved: Shoshana, Natan and Yosef. Then Yocheved tragically died in childbirth along with her fourth child in 1905.

In 1908 Eliyahu married Yocheved's younger sister Alta Devorah, who was 17 years old at the time. Eliyahu had



*Alta Devorah  
née Buchwald*



*Family tree of Eliyahu, his two wives,  
and his seven children*

four more children with Alta: Leah, Mordechai, Arie Leib and Elissa.

Alta was only 8 years older than Eliyahu's eldest daughter Shoshana and some tensions apparently

existed between Alta and her sister Yocheved's children. One of Shoshana's daughters, Yvette, thought Alta favored her own four biological children over her sister's children. Yosef called it a "strained relationship" and blamed his father for the tension. Eliyahu insisted that Yocheved's children call Alta by her first name instead of calling her "Mama." Shoshana's other daughter, Aliza, framed this saying:

*My mother (Shoshana) was "orphaned" at a young age, and though my grandfather Eliyahu got married to my grandmother's sister Alta, my mother carried the feeling of orphanhood all her life. From here, I think, came her devotion, love and unconditional sacrifice to her children.*

It is not clear how Eliyahu initially supported his young growing family. It is most likely he worked with his older brother, Avraham, often called Avram Yankel, who was 10 years his senior, and learned how to manage building projects.

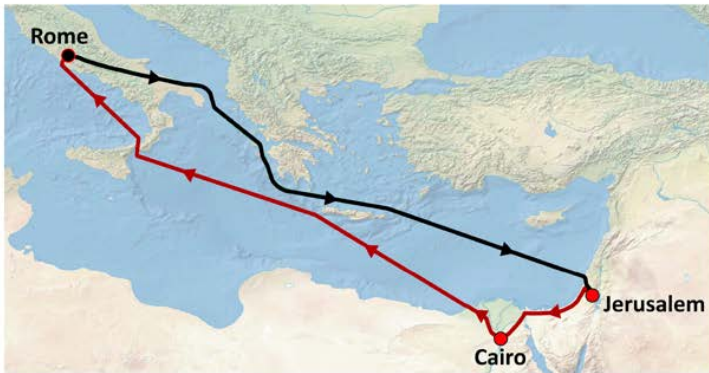
In 1910 Eliyahu and Avram Yankel decided they should obtain Italian citizenship. At that time there would have been several advantages to being an Italian citizen including:

- having more general and legal protection than being a citizen of the Ottoman Empire;
- having an easier time traveling internationally (this was important for Avram Yankel who traveled internationally for fundraising for various charity organizations);
- avoiding paying property taxes, since foreign citizens were exempt from paying certain taxes.

Elissa's brother Yosef told the following story about the efforts of Eliyahu and Avram Yankel to obtain Italian citizenship papers:

*"They went to Cairo, in 1910. They came to Cairo, and some Palestinian Jew or a domestic Jew, a native Jew, said to them 'we will get you the Italian citizenship papers. You'll stay here 2 months and you pay me so much and you'll get them'.*

*So they were in Egypt, my father, Eliyahu, and my uncle, Avram Yankel, and they stayed there for 2 months or 3 months. And the locals came back to them and said, 'we can not get you the citizenship in Cairo, you must go to Rome and get it.' So they already invested time and money, so they said now we might as well go to Rome and get it. So they both took the boat to Rome and they stayed there 5 months and they got their citizenship papers and then they came back.*



*The route Elissa's father and uncle likely traveled to obtain Italian citizenship*

*They came back and three or four years later we had to leave again, in 1915 they had to leave again and go back to Egypt, to Alexandria."*

When Elissa's family returned from Alexandria in 1919 her father starting lining up contracting jobs in and around Mea Shearim, one of the fastest growing



*Photo of trenches being dug in Mea Shearim as part of the sewer project that Eliyahu managed in 1920*



Jewish sections of Jerusalem. Eliyahu's first big job came when he landed the contract for a large sewer project which required digging trenches and installing new sewer pipes throughout Mea Shearim. The project was completed by the end of 1920.

Eliyahu ran his contracting business from his home office, which was a frequent subject of family stories. Elissa's niece Yvette said this about it:

*"Alta, the second wife of Eliyahu, my "Saba" (Grandfather), kept a spotless house, and Saba sported a real office, with one of the the first Hebrew typewriters. In the evening lots of workers came to see him, to be paid, to complain and to take orders. No trade unions and overtime pay existed at the time, and Saba was very much the boss, respected by a handful of faithful workers, but beginning to have trouble with young ones who wanted hourly and holiday pay, and all the things I could not yet understand but listened avidly to. Saba's house always had 4-5 rooms as well as a kitchen and bathroom. He changed houses frequently, probably sampling his own wares so to speak. His office (probably through Alta's exhortations) was on a different floor and separate from the dwelling. so that she didn't have to deal with any muddy footprints. Saba's house was always airy and smelt of clean bedclothes and Saba's Bergamot snuff. Delicious!"*



*Bergamot  
snuff box*



*Illustration of a home office like the one  
Eliyahu used to run his contracting business*

Yvette's sister Aliza also remembered her grandfather's office:

*"My grandfather was a very wise man; he was a building contractor, and he built the Bikur Holim Hospital, the Hebrew Gymnasia and more. He learned the building profession on his own, and I remember that in his house there was a room that was used as an office and in it he kept building plans, something that wasn't customary in other houses those days. It had a typewriter, and my uncle Arie used it for correspondence. We would go there often, at any hour and at any time.*



How Eliyahu learned the building profession “on his own” is interesting to think about. After all, he was the decedent of at least three generations, likely more, of Torah scholars whose livelihoods depended on the financial enterprises of their wives and stipends funded by their religious community.

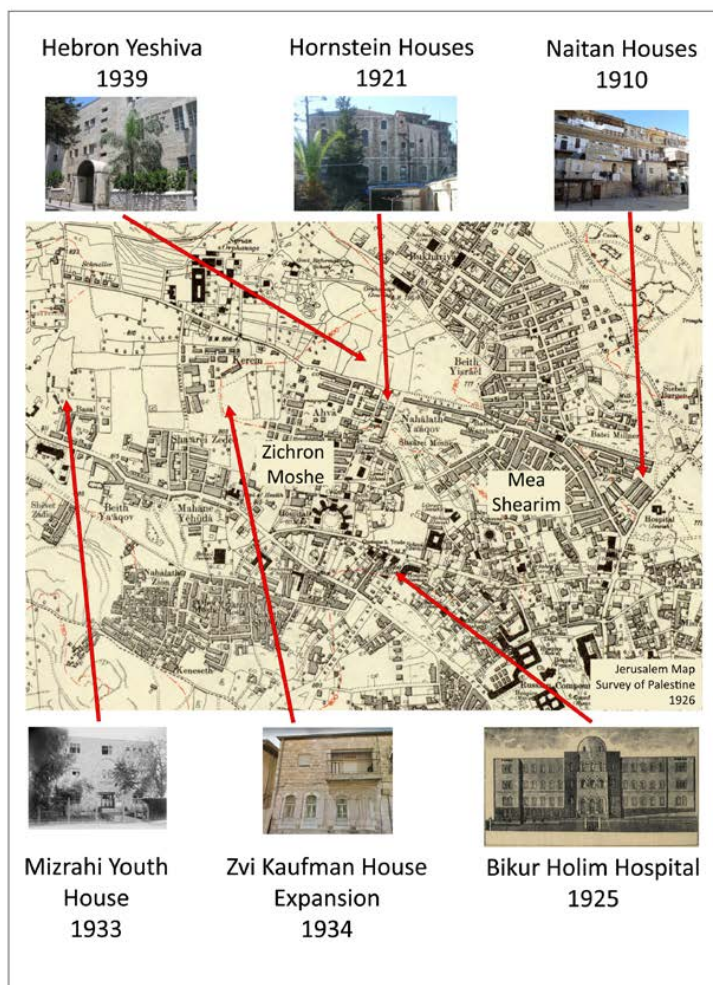
One likely explanation is that Eliyahu started working with Avram Yankel, his older brother, who was also a builder in Jerusalem. Avram Yankel, according to a great grandson of his, was a student and a friend of a Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Baharan. Besides being a Rabbi and Torah scholar, Rabbi Baharan was also a businessman and a founder of new neighborhoods in Jerusalem, including Mea Shearim. He was also one of the founders of the Jerusalem Builders Company, which specialized in building planning, buying land, and land management.

Rabbi Baharan was an impactful figure for the Cohen family. Whether out of conviction or necessity, Rabbi Baharan saw the need for allocating philanthropic funds towards the development of civic infrastructure, such as hospitals and housing, rather than to exclusively fund Torah scholarship.

Through the Jerusalem Builders Company it is likely Avram Yankel learned about property development and construction. In turn, this would have provided Eliyahu an opportunity to learn the building trade. Avram Yankel went on to master other professions, such as fundraising and hospital administration, including the role he played as a senior manager at the Bikur Holim Hospital in Jerusalem for many years.

Eliyahu, through his own contracting business, managed the construction of dozens of private and public buildings in several neighborhoods around

Jerusalem. Some of the buildings he built, along with their locations, are detailed on the 1926 map of Jerusalem below. Other buildings not shown include the Russian Refugee Houses, the Moshav Zakani



Houses, the Hebrew Gymnasium, and the Gamilot Chesedim Building in Zichron Moshe.

Elissa's brother Arie'el told a story of a challenging business investment that Eliyahu made into a stone crushing machine. Arie'el recounted:

*You see, at that time making a living in Jerusalem was very hard. At that time there was a lot of building development but also a lot of competition. And at that time they use to use "seid" they called it in Hebrew, "quicklime" in English. But then a certain time later they started using a cement in combination with gravel. And my father learned about a machine that could help make gravel, "chatzats" we would say in Hebrew, it was a stone grinding machine. He thought it would help him make a living with it. So there was a German catalog that described this stone grinding machine, and he ordered a machine.*

*And this machine has a special story, I'm telling you. He went in together with my Uncle Avram Yankel's son, An, my cousin. And they put in their money hoping they could help make a living from it. But until it came, and until it started to work, is a big story. You could write a thousand pages about it and you would not be done with it.*

*First, they would not even let it go on the street because it was too heavy so it had to come packed in pieces. They had to bring a special mechanic from Germany to dismantle it and to put it back together. And they had to*

*pay the hotel for the mechanic's lodging and pay all his other expenses.*

*You know, my father, I would say, my father was a very hard worker and he liked to make an estimate in business, finish the job and then get paid. But to see a project take so very long, you know, you lose the patience, you lose the mood to work with it. And my father said when we brought the machine from Germany till it was put in place shouldn't take more than one month until we can start using it. But it is already taking two months, three months and we still cannot tell when it will be ready to use.*

*Finally, they got it working. And my older brother Natan nearly lost his foot with that machine - it was a real miracle that he did not. At that time they were working with the Yemenite Jews and a stone got stuck in the machine. A stone fell in and the machine stopped working. He went up to the top of the machine and he used his foot to push and push the stone in. His shoe got caught and pulled in and he pulled out his foot from the shoe just in time. And I'm telling you, my father got mad and said Natan should not work on top of the machine any more.*

*And he used to bring the chatzats machine, this gravel machine to different places. And it stood there for 13, 14, 15 years and they couldn't sell it, and they paid rent to house it, and they could not sell it. It was as big as a building!*



*Photo of a stone crushing machine for making gravel similar to the one Eliyahu and An bought ~1930*

*And there were others that it was competing with and they had to keep putting money into it. And for the others, his partners, it did not matter, because they did not have any money to put in, so all the maintenance expenses fell onto my father's shoulders. And when World War II came, someone finally bought it and the sales price did not cover all the expenses and money invested, but then all my father's partners still came and asked for part of the sales proceeds!*

Through Eliyahu's career he gained the respect of other builders in Jerusalem and became the first chairman of the Contractors Association for

**Construction and Road Construction.** In addition to Eliyahu's building activities, he also played a role in community services. He was a board member of the Bikur Cholim Hospital, an active member of the homeowners' association in the Zichron Moshe neighborhood and a gabbai (congregation official) in the Ahli Yaakov synagogue.

Eliyahu also played a role leading the combined fund raising efforts for a Talmud school named Etz Chaim Talmud Torah Institute and the Bikur Cholim Hospital. The resulting charity was called the "United Charity Institutions of Jerusalem."



*Fund raising bulletin circa 1925 for the  
United Charity Institutions of Jerusalem*



But who was Eliyahu? Aside from his active business life and his role as a community leader, what was he like as a person?

Well the answer depends on who you ask.

Elissa's brother Joe said the following about their father:



*Eliyahu Cohen*

*We saw Ben Gurion often because the Va'ad Haleumi (The National Council) was housed in our house. They rented a section of it from us. Ben Gurion every afternoon would come around to the Va'ad HaLeumi, he didn't have too much of a name yet in those days. Well anyway, my father established a name for himself as an established contractor. When the Histadrut (the Labor Union organization), which was headed by Ben Gurion at that time, got into the business of contracting, they needed a person who knew the business. So they called in my father to try to persuade him to join the union, to join the Histadrut, and to work for them, and supervise jobs for them. Well, I remember when he went for the appointment with Ben Gurion. I was really hoping that he would make a deal with him. Because I knew somehow that my father struggled; he has a little job here and then he doesn't have a little job. I figure that if he is going to get a job with the Histadrut, he's going to be on the payroll, have a consistent*



*job, and I thought it would be good for him. So I was hoping that he was going to make a deal. When he came back we asked him 'well what is it?' He said, "No deal, I didn't want to accept it." I really don't know the details but he said he didn't want to be an employee of someone else.*

*I don't think he was a good businessman. He was afraid, he was all the time afraid to risk. A good businessman is not afraid to risk. Maybe it's because I got to know him a little better when I matured and at that time he was much older already. And at that time he didn't want to risk. In 1933, he lost all confidence in himself at that time I think.*

And a niece of Elissa, Yvette, said:

*Grandfather Eliyahu must have been my model paternal figure and I loved and respected him. Because "Ima" (her mother, Shoshana) loved and respected him I echoed her in every way. It was not at all difficult to worship such a tremendously strong, virile character, brimming with personality and poise. Of course, he had a temper, but a very rare and controlled one. I also know that I was his favorite granddaughter and since he boasted 17 grandchildren and goodness knows how many great grandchildren, this was a feather in my cap.*

*It was a treat being allowed to go and see Saba (Grandfather). Whereas he was*

*intolerant and strict with his own children he was not so with me. However, I soon learnt when to stop misbehaving and carrying on if his face wore an expression of "Now stop it". He didn't need to look at me twice. Saba often took me on his little brown donkey when traveling round his various building sites (what a treat it was!), his building-contractor's work blossoming and prospering by the time he was middle-aged. Someone said "what a lovely daughter you have, Mr. Cohen", and he replied proudly "my granddaughter, if you please!"; indeed he was forty years my senior.*



*Illustration of Eliyahu and granddaughter*

Another of Elissa's brothers, Mordechai, had yet a different perspective. Mordechai said:

*When my father died I really thought that my world, my whole world, my entire world came down. It's not only because I had considered my father as a father, but I was so attached to him. I always talked with him, about all different problems I talked with my father. My father was considered to be a clever man.*

*In the eulogy I said for him I said he was a self-made man because he was born in the old Yeshuv (the Old City). There they were not self-maintaining they were dependent on the Coheneem (the religious priests), and took donations and the Coheneem kept them going. But my father from his very youth he was self supporting and he brought himself up and he advanced himself and he had a certain part in the upbuilding of Yerushaliyem, of the new city, and the new systems of work. He was the first contractor that engaged Jewish labor instead of Arab labor and so he advanced the upbuilding of the country. And when he was gone, we started a new period in our lives.*

One can see that different family members have different perspectives of the same person. It is fair to say that family stories sometimes tell more about the storyteller than the subject of the story.

Nonetheless, one can gather from family anecdotes that Eliyahu was a complex individual, having a range of strengths and weaknesses, like all of us. On the downside, as Joe pointed out, Eliyahu might have been somewhat hesitant when it came to making bold business decisions. Mordechai noted elsewhere that Eliyahu occasionally exaggerated his medical problems and often seemed overly concerned about his health. Everyone agreed that Eliyahu had a temper, which for the most part, he managed to keep in check. On the positive side, Eliyahu was unwavering in his commitment to provide for his family. During the family's exile in Alexandria, he hustled to make a living, initially selling goods and exchanging money on the streets to get by. He also was a self-made man, learning the building trade at an early age.



*Illustration of Eliyahu working with architectural drawing*



In 1946, a year after Eliyahu's passing, three eulogies were published in the newspaper Ha-Tsofeh (The Observer). One of these eulogies, authored by Yeshayahu Peres, a fellow member of the Zichron Moshe neighborhood committee, eloquently portrayed Eliyahu as a blend of Torah and 'Derech Eretz.' 'Derech Eretz' translates to "the way of the land" but also implies "working for a living." This description captures Eliyahu well: he was a devout follower of religious traditions spanning generations, yet also an individual who pursued a professional career, setting him apart from his forebears.

Indeed, a defining feature of Eliyahu could be said to be his unique life path. Departing from his ancestors' role as full-time Torah scholars, he embraced a life that blended his professional pursuits with his religious convictions. As a secular professional, he assumed leadership roles within his community, chairing the Zichron Moshe neighborhood association and serving as the first chairman of a contractors' organization specializing in building and road construction. Within his synagogue, he diligently fulfilled the role of a "*gabbi*", carrying out various administrative and religious responsibilities. Eliyahu also spearheaded fundraising initiatives for charitable causes, including the local hospital (Bikur Cholim) and the religious school (Etz Haayim).

Celebrating Shabbat and valuing his family served as the two foundational principles of Eliyahu's life. Shoshana, his eldest daughter, wrote nostalgically in a memoir saying:

*My father, may he rest in peace, was a combination of goodness and devotion on the*

*one hand, and strict views and firmness on the other.*

*I remember one winter it was very cold, and on one of the rainy days my father didn't let me go to school for fear I would catch a cold. He gave me a note to give to the teacher, in which he wrote: "Because of the heavy rains, I will not let my daughter, Shoshana, go to school."*

*In the afternoon before Shabbat, father would always sit down and shine his shoes for Shabbat. On the evening of Shabbat he wore a beautiful kaftan with stripes, as was the custom in Jerusalem, and it was tied with a sash. On the kaftan he wore a beautiful black coat to go to synagogue. I don't remember a single Shabbat that he didn't bring home a guest.*

*I still remember hearing my father read the Torah portion of the week, in his distinct voice, on Shabbat morning, while everyone else was sleeping, before he went to synagogue. I really liked hearing him, and I see him and hear him even now.*

Yaakov Aviad (whose birth name was Valensky), a nephew of Elissa's, poetically described the life of his grandfather Eliyahu as "a succession of Sabbaths full of light and radiance, one sacred celebration after another."





*Illustration of the family gathered on Shabbos eve*



## Chapter 4:

# *Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'*

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*F*lissa's brother Yosef was a story teller. Joe, as he was known in the United States, loved telling stories and loved the stories he told. He told them with a smile in his eyes and laughed before he could get out the punch line.



*Illustration of a young man resembling  
Yosef, traveling to the US in 1924*

When Yosef returned to Jerusalem from Alexandria with his family around 1920, he and his brother Natan continued writing mezuzahs for about a year while his father re-started his contracting business. Once Yosef's father landed a few building contracts and some money started coming in, Yosef, at age 17, enrolled as a full-time student in the Mizrachi Teacher's Seminary, where an interesting combination of traditional religious and secular classes were taught.

חבר המורים שבבית המדרש למורים "מזרחי"	
ראים ליפשיין, הכנה	(עברית, תולדות ישראל, תורת החנוך וההוראה)
הרב ש. אסף	(תלמוד)
הרב מ. אופטובסקי	(תלמוד, משנה)
הרב ד"ר יצחק טירקין	(תלמוד, פסיכולוגיה, תולדות החנוך, היסטוריה)
הרב ש. ליכטמן מ. א.	(הלכות)
ד"ר נח חכם	(חנך, תולדות ישראל, היסטוריה)
ד"ר א"י בראור	(ניאוגרפיה, היסטוריה)
ד"ר ו. היות	(סתחתיקא)
מר ג. אונא	(סתחתיקא, פסיקא)
ד"ר ח. א. גינזבורג	(אנגלית)
מר מ. כריתחוקאל	(עברית, ספרות)
ד"ר י. ש. אנגל	(מתמטיקה)
ד"ר י. באבאר	(כימיה)
ד"ר מ. וידל	(דקדוק)
מר י. אביווהר	(טבע, כימיה)
מר א. גוריון	(התקבלות)
מר י. חרלסוב, אמרדפשי	(זמרה)
מר זאב כרצבי	(ציור)
מר ח. מורחי	(שקורי הוראה מעשית)
מר ש. פושינסקי ב. א.	(שקורי הוראה מעשית)
מר בנציון שפירא	(שקורי הוראה מעשית)
מר ת. ילין (בחופש)	(עברית, ניד)

*Original list of faculty and subjects taught at the  
"Mizrachi" Teachers' Seminary and English  
translation (next page)*

### **Faculty at the "Mizrachi" Teachers' Seminary**

<b>Rabbi E.M. Lifshitz, Director</b>	Hebrew, Israeli History, Theory of Education & Teaching
<b>Rabbi S. Assaf</b>	Talmud (Rabbinic Texts)
<b>Rabbi M. Ostrovsky</b>	Talmud, Mishnah Studies (Jewish Legal Texts)
<b>Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Mirkin</b>	Talmud, Psychology, Educational Methods, History
<b>Rabbi S. Lieberman, MA</b>	Talmud
<b>Dr. Noah Hacham</b>	Bible, Israeli History, History
<b>Dr. A. Y. Baror</b>	Geography, History
<b>Dr. Z. Hayut</b>	Mathematics
<b>Mr. G. Unna</b>	Mathematics, Physics
<b>Dr. H. A. Ginsburg</b>	English
<b>Mr. M. Ben-Yehzekel</b>	Hebrew, Literature
<b>Dr. Y. S. Engel</b>	Teaching Methodology
<b>Dr. Y. Bavad</b>	Chemistry
<b>Dr. M. Zeidel</b>	Grammar
<b>Mr. Y. Abizohar</b>	Nature, Chemistry
<b>Mr. A. Gurion</b>	Exercise
<b>Mr. Y. Kharlamov</b>	Singing
<b>Mr. Zeev Ben-Zvi</b>	Drawing
<b>Mr. H. Mizrahi</b>	Practical Teaching Lessons
<b>Mr. S. Pushinsky MA</b>	Practical Teaching Lessons
<b>Mr. Benzion Shapira</b>	Practical Teaching Lessons
<b>Mr. H. Yalon</b>	Hebrew, "Prophets" and "Writings" (Bible), (On leave)

The Mizrahi Teacher's Seminary was started around 1920 by Eliezer Meir Lifshitz, who was an early advocate for the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language. Lifshitz moved to Palestine in 1909 from Lviv, Ukraine, began teaching in Hebrew at several schools in Jerusalem and was exiled in 1917 by the Turks in a manner similar to Yosef's family's exile.

When Lifhsitz returned to British Mandate Palestine in 1920 he became the first Director of the Mizrachi Teachers' Seminary. As reflected in the subject list above, a founding tenant of the school was to teach non-religious subjects such as mathematics, science, literature, and other secular disciplines in a way that was compatible with the traditional teachings of Jewish law and religious texts.



*Photo of the original Mizrachi Teachers' Seminary,  
subsequently named the Lifshitz College of Education*

Yosef studied at this seminary for three years and then decided to leave for the United States. In his own words:

*I enjoyed studying at the seminary, I  
loved every minute of it. But you see, it was  
the fad at the time. All the youth go to United*

States. Go to America. And everybody went 'Extra-quota'. Who could go 'Extra-quota'?- the Rabbi.

So all the youth of my age became Rabbis. And in those days we thought what is the sign of a Rabbi? - A beard. So we all grew beards and we became Rabbis. And how did we become Rabbis, you have to have a certificate and we were not Rabbis. So each one found some authority who did a favor to him and gave him a certificate that he's a Rabbi. And who gave me my certificate? That was a Rabbi - Rabbi Kook, the Chief Rabbi. I had an 'in' there. That was my family had an 'in'. First, my father built some building that had to do with the association of Rabbi Kook. And also my uncle, Avram Yankel Cohen, my father's brother, was a colleague, he was a learned man, he was more learned than my father in Talmud, and he was a colleague of Rabbi Kook.

So Rabbi Kook gave me, it was not an official certificate, but it was a document, 'This is to certify that Rabbi Yoseph Cohen is a Rabbi,' and it was typewritten in Hebrew and translated into English with an official seal. And I had to give him a "Kas-Of," which means a handshake agreement, that as soon as I came to the US in safety that I will mail it back. And to whom would I mail it back? I'd mail it to my Uncle and he would surrender it to Rev. Kook's office, and that's what I did. So I came with a beard here.



Yosef boarded the S.S. Madonna by himself in the Port of Jaffa and arrived in Providence, Rhode Island on May 31, 1924.



He was listed on the ship's manifest as Joseph Cohen, age 21, and his occupation was noted as "Rabbi." The S.S. Madonna was certainly an "ironic ship name" for a boat full of religious Jews from Jerusalem, as a relative of another passenger noted in a comment posted online.

The voyage took nearly 4 weeks and though Yosef traveled first class, he was not able to eat in the main dining room because it did not serve kosher food. He was concerned the word would get back to his father that he did not eat the "hard boiled eggs, potatoes and sardines" his fellow religious passengers were living on.

Yosef travelled first class, because his father had heard first class passengers had a much easier time entering the United States. It also shows that the family had enough money to pay for a first-class ticket.

Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'

An arrival document (shown below), was created and archived by HIAS, and shows Yoseph started using the English version of his name, Joseph, when he disembarked on June 1, 1924. HIAS was the acronym for a very active refugee aid organization called the Hebrew Sheltering & Immigrant Aid Society of America.

Hebrew Sheltering & Immigrant Aid Society of America				RECORD OF CASE				Embarkation Department	
Vessel <i>Madona</i>		Storage-Cabin		Date <i>6-1-24</i>		Time <i>8:30</i>		Case No.	
Port of Landing <i>Ros.</i>		Report to Imm. Officers		No. of Persons: Men <i>1</i>		Women		Children	
Passport <i>By himself</i>									
Family Name <i>Joseph</i>		First and Middle		AGE	SEX	NATIVITY	Place of Last Foreign Residence	OCCUPATION	Time in U.S.
				<i>21</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>I. Jerusalem</i>	<i>Jaffe</i>	<i>Student</i>	
						<i>Wired to case</i>			
Destined to: Relationship <i>Cousin</i>		Name <i>A. H. Shochet</i>		Name <i>of Goodman</i>					
Address <i>170 E. 118 St. Ctg.</i>									
Sheltered from Date		Time		to Date		Time		No. of Meals Served	
Valuables Deposited		Advertised (date and other particulars)							
Discharged on		at <i>A. M.</i>		Place		Received by <i>Moved to 207 E. 130 St.</i>		Address	
Baggage Check No.									

Joseph, who called himself Joe on his arrival, recalled:

*The people from HIAS were there already, they knew that there is a boat coming in and there are immigrants so their representatives from New York were there. And somebody asked me "where are you going?" I said I'm going to New York. Who have you got in New York?" I said I have nobody. So they said, "Alright, come with us." So they put me on a boat, an overnight boat, on those boats that go on the Hudson, and in the morning he said to me "when you get there in the morning*

*you'll be in New York, look for our man with his hat, with a sign that says HIAS, and they'll take care of you from then on." And that's what they did. They met me at the boat there, they took me off, they brought me to their building, they gave me a bed, and three meals a day.*

Joe was very appreciative and respectful of the help he and hundreds of thousands of other immigrants received from HIAS.

### HIAS

HIAS was formed in 1909 when the Hebrew Sheltering House merged with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. A few key objectives stated by the joint organization were:

- To facilitate the lawful entry of Jewish immigrants into the various ports of the United States
- To provide those in need with temporary shelter, food, clothing, and such other aid as may be found necessary
- To guide the immigrants to their destination and to help them obtain employment.

HIAS has continued to pursue its mission over the years as conditions around the world changed. After initially helping to settle Jewish refugees fleeing from Eastern Europe, HIAS expanded with refugee aid

services within European countries. During and after World War II they contributed to efforts to resettle displaced persons. During the Soviet Jewish emigration, HIAS helped Jews leave the USSR and resettle in the US and elsewhere. HIAS expanded its work with non-Jewish refugees through the late 20th century.



*Photo of HIAS's main office in NYC ~1945*

Today, HIAS provides services to refugees of all backgrounds, including legal aid, advocacy and resettlement services. Now an international organization, HIAS is assisting refugees and asylum seekers in the United States Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. Recently in 2022, HIAS announced they received a \$10 million grant from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, to support its work aiding refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

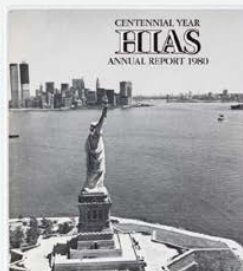
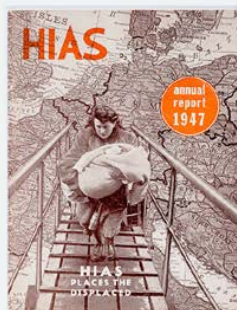
Overall, HIAS has helped more than four million refugees since its founding. The shift from providing refuge to Jewish immigrants to assisting displaced persons of all backgrounds drew some criticism that HIAS has moved too far from its Jewish-focused roots. In response to this criticism, Mark Hetfield, the present CEO of HIAS, gave a sage-like counterargument in a 2018 interview with Vox. He explained:

*In the earlier part of our history, we advocated for people because they were Jews, because they were "landsmen", from the same town in the old country. And we tried to beg for charity, first from the US, and then when the United States shut its doors, from other countries to take Jews in.*

*But we began to realize that if you want to be successful, you can't advocate for just Jewish resettlement, you have to advocate for the rights of refugees to be protected. You have to advocate for all human rights. We had to update our model from the Soviet Jewry era.*

*Now we welcome refugees not because they're Jewish, but because we're Jewish.*

*Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'*



*HIAS Annual Report covers*



Joe arrived with a limited knowledge of English and he explained how he set about to learn English:

*When I first came here I got myself a Hebrew teacher's job. First thing I said is I have to learn English now. I knew a very limited amount of English because in Egypt and in Palestine, in the Seminary, we studied English. I would say I knew 300 - 400 words. So I bought myself a dictionary and I took out from the library easy books first. And everyday, I and a friend of mine studied everyday four or five hours. We read the stories, we memorized all the words, after that I left him and I studied myself. And I memorized words and then I started reading books. Stories. I remember the first books I attacked were the Three Musketeers, all Alexandre Dumas works, I read those in English. Then when I gained a little knowledge of English I entered the university.*

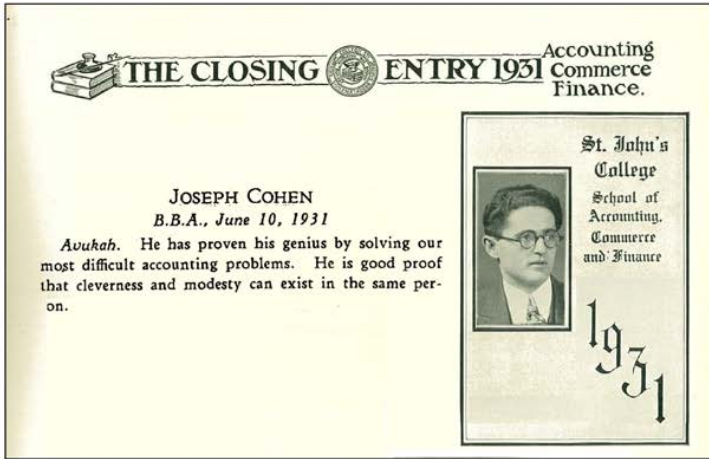


*Picture from Joe's  
1931 yearbook*

Joe studied at St. John's College in Brooklyn and graduated in 1931 with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

This achievement was particularly significant considering he had only a rudimentary grasp of English when he first arrived in 1924.





*Joe's yearbook student profile from his senior year at St. John's College, School of Accounting, Commerce and Finance*

Joe's college year book profile noted that he was part of "Avukah", an American Zionist youth organization. It was affiliated with a larger international Hebrew youth organization and had chapters on college campuses whose aim was to promote Jewish cultural identity.

Before and during his time at St. John's College, Joe taught Hebrew school. As he recalled:

*I was a Hebrew school teacher in downtown New York City on Rivington Street, at the big Romanian synagogue. The Roumanishe Schule they use to call it. They had a Hebrew school there and I was a teacher there for maybe 6 years. And Lil was*

*Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'*

*in my highest class. I was teaching the highest class and that's where we met. From there on we had a romance.*



*Photo of the Roumanishe Shul,  
housed on Rivington Street  
in the Lower East Side of Manhattan*

Joe married Lillian Morgenstern, his former student, in 1933, and they had a big wedding at the home of Lillian's mother and father - Benjamin and Becky Morgenstern. Joe's cousin Shochit and his wife attended and the wedding was officiated by Joe's Hebrew school principle.

Joe and Lillian went on a 3-month trip to Palestine and considered moving there but Joe couldn't find a

job that suited him. They returned to the US to live in Ellenville, New York, in the heart of the Catskill Mountains. On their return, Joe took and passed the exam to become a CPA.

Joe described how his accounting career got started:

*I passed the examination for a Federal Bank auditor. There must have been 200 or 300 people at that exam. It was the depression. I passed the examination, and I got a letter; "Would I consider changing my position?" Instead of a Federal auditor position, the Internal Revenue Service needed people. "Would I consider going to work for the Internal Revenue Service instead of the Federal Bank?" So, I said, sure, gladly, anything! Hold the line, I'm coming!*

*Knowing there were so many people, I figured a little politics, - what we call in Yiddish 'proteksia', here we would call it 'pull' - wouldn't hurt. So in Ellenville, there was a lawyer, a Jewish lawyer, who would travel to Albany, and he was an assistant D.A. It was a politician's job. And I became acquainted with him. How did I become acquainted with him? In the synagogue, the first year, they had a celebration, and they appointed me the main speaker. They all spoke Yiddish, so I spoke in Yiddish, and I rather impressed them. He bumped into me once and told me how I impressed him. So when I got the letter about a possible job opening, I went over to talk to him and explained the situation. Now I'm sure there must have been 300 or 400*

*people wanting the job, and I don't know how many jobs they had. Maybe they have 50, maybe 100, even then it's 3 to 1. "I don't know if you can do something about it."*

*He said, "Whether we have to or not, we'll do it anyway." So he wrote a letter to the politicians and he said, "The entire city of Ellenville will appreciate an appointment for Joe Cohen in the Internal Revenue Service and so on." Whether that helped or not, I don't know. But I was appointed.*

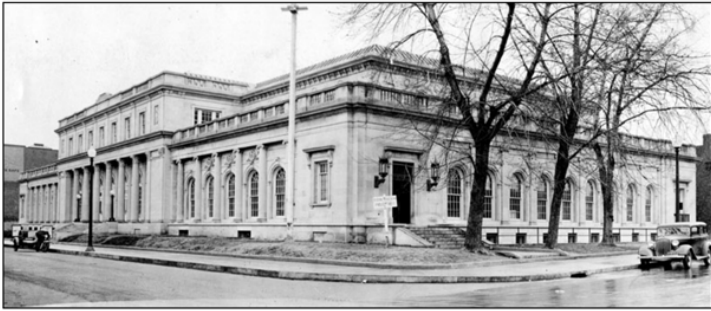
*They sent me a letter. At that time, I was making exactly \$30 a week as a Hebrew school teacher, and I had little accounts on the side. They offered me \$50 a week right away, so it was quite an elevated position. Finally, I got a letter, and then I had to go through all kinds of examinations and background examinations.*

*And I was appointed a revenue agent. They gave me a course for three months in New York, on the payroll, on income taxes. When I finished the two months, at the end of August, they called us in. First, they asked us for preference, did we want to serve in the west, north, south... Each one gave his preference. Naturally, I gave my preference in New York. Then they said they had three openings in upstate New York. One in Schenectady, one in Amsterdam, and a third in Robertsville. And there were three people who wanted to stay in New York state. So they called us all in, and they said who wants Schenectady? And everyone raised their hand*

*Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'*

*because Schenectady was the biggest town.  
So the chief said, "Take out your coins," and  
we flipped. I won Schenectady!*

So winning the flip of a coin brought Joe and Lillian to Schenectady where they settled and raised a family. They joined the Agudat Achim Congregation where Joe served several terms as president and even helped out as the congregation's "lay rabbi" during a search for a full-time rabbi.



*Joe worked at the US Treasury Department in  
Schenectady in the US Post Office on Jay Street. The  
building had recently been renovated as part of a New  
Deal Federal Works Project in the early 1930s.*

In his accounting career, Joe worked for the government for about 10 years and then worked as a senior partner in an accounting firm (Cohen, Scheer, & Sherman). In 1945 he went out on his own and established an accounting firm under his own name, where he worked until he retired in 1977. In

retirement, Joe studied for a Master's degree at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City.

Following a fulfilling family life, a successful career, and active engagement in civic activities, Joe passed away in 1979.

Joe's life story demonstrates a challenging journey through exile, immigration, formal and self-directed education and adaption to a new culture. Joe appears to have had a tireless spirit of "whatever it takes, I will master it". He told the story of looking for a job in Palestine when he visited there in 1933 with Lillian. Joe felt the salaries were too low for his liking but before he determined that he spoke with a potential employer who was an English-speaking CPA. The potential employer was impressed with Joe's ability to speak Hebrew, Yiddish and English fluently, but asked if Joe also spoke Arabic. Joe responded, "No, I don't know Arabic, but it's not a big deal. If I have to learn Arabic, I'll learn Arabic."

This exemplified Joe's approach for learning whatever it takes to move forward in life. But for the help of HIAS, which he greatly appreciated, Joe figured out on his own how to navigate the system in a new country, initially without a firm grasp of the language or culture.

His fluency with Hebrew and Yiddish and his teaching skills sustained him until he could master his new environment. Quickly learning a new language and obtaining an accounting degree while working, shows the drive, confidence and competency Joe used to tenaciously shape his own future in a new land.

*Into the Welcoming arms of 'HIAS'*



*Joe shown in one of his  
professional photos*





## Chapter 5:

# An Old Hasidic Tale

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**E**lissa's brother Mordechai was ordained a rabbi in 1932 by the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. While Mordechai received a traditional religious education during his early years, he forged a distinctive path for himself later in his youth. As a teenager, he studied secular subjects on his own, proceeded to study abroad in London, and returned to British Mandate Palestine where he obtained a law degree, and became a partner in a



*An illustration of Reb. Zosha, from an old  
Hasidic tale Mordechai liked to tell*

business, while still independently authoring scholarly books on Talmudic topics.

The unique course Mordechai crafted for himself led him to believe in the significance of cultivating personal talents and finding contentment with one's own chosen path. He liked telling a Hasidic story of an old man's reflections about appearing before the "Beit Din shel Ma'aleh," the heavenly high court that evaluates the actions and deeds of individuals. Mordechais' version of the tale went like this:

*My father encouraged me to be as I am. He always said everyone should be what he is. And afterwards I heard a fitting story of Hasidic origin.*

*They said there was a certain Hasid, he was called Reb. Zosha. And Reb. Zosha said: "If I come to the high court in the next world and I am asked 'Why weren't you like Moses Rabbeinu, like Moses our great teacher?' I would say I could not come close to being like Moses, he had such a great intelligence, far far beyond anything I had."*

*And Reb. Zosha said: "And if I come to the high court and I am asked 'Why have you not been like Rabbi Akiva, the great Torah scholar and teacher?' I have plenty of enough reasons to answer.*

*But if they say 'Reb. Zosha, why have you not been like Reb. Zosha?' then what can I answer?"*

*So the meaning is you have to be who you are, the focus should be on fulfilling one's own potential and being true to oneself. And*

*this I tried all my life, not to present myself differently from who I am. Not to make an impression on somebody else that is not what I am. I am the man I am.*

Mordechai remembered the schools and the many teachers of his youth. There was some discussion at home to decide whether Mordechai should attend a modern school with both religious and secular studies called Tachkemoni, or if he should attend the more traditional Talmud Torah school in Mea Shearim. He ended up enrolling in the Mea Shearim Talmud Torah.



*Photo of the Mea Shearim Talmud Torah*

When Mordechai first arrived, he was examined by the principal of the school, Reb Wechtfuegel, for placement in the appropriate level class. Mordechai remembered that Reb. Wechtfuegel asked him about the Talmud chapter called “Elu Metziot,” a chapter traditionally taught to children who are first beginning to study Talmud, a chapter pertaining to lost objects. Moredechai recalled:

*Reb. Yitzhak Yankif Wechtfuegel examined me on Elu Metziot, only three pages in the Talmud, and then he said, I won't keep you in this lower class, I will place you in a higher class. And since then, Reb Wechtfuegel paid attention to me and my studies. I kept a connection with him until very late in my life. Even in my 30s, after I graduated Mea Shearim and the schools that followed, and then when I was studying on my own, I always used to come and consult with Reb. Yitzhak Yankif Wechtfuegel. He was my real teacher, my real mentor. He passed away only recently when he was over 90 years old.*

Mordechai was placed in the class of the melamed (teacher) Reb. Mot Rebinger and Mordechai remembers studying diligently in this class. After three years studying mostly Talmud it was time to start preparing for his Bar Mitzvah. The custom was for the Bar Mitzvah boy to present a “Drasha,” a speech or a lesson. Usually it was based on a topic in Jewish religious law that was discussed and analyzed and ended with a conclusion to tie it all up. Then thanks would be given to the parents, to the family, to the

Rabbi and all the community. Mordechai remembered the topic of his Bar Mitzvah Drasha:

*I was nearly 13 years old, my father came to Reb Mot Rebinger and he said, "You will have to teach my son a Drasha." Reb Rebinger said, "Your son doesn't need that I should teach him - he can teach himself a Drasha." So I went to Reb. Yitzhak Yankif and he said that I should present a Drasha on the following subject: If one has had an amputation and lost a left hand, and one can't put on Tifillin on the left hand, does one have to put Tefillin on one's head or not?*



*Illustration of a Bar Mitzvah boy resembling Mordechai delivering his Bar Mitzvah "Drasha" to his classmates and teachers*

*I remember preparing my Drasha by collecting the various arguments for and against the need to put Tifillin on one's head, and then summarizing my conclusion. And I remember delivering the Drasha at my Bar Mitzvah very well.*

*The Bar Mitzvah was a very nice celebration. As part of the celebration my mother prepared three or four Kugels and we emptied the entire house of the furniture so that people could get in and many notables of Zichron Moshe came to the Bar Mitzvah.*



*Photo of Yeshiva students studying*

Mordechai continued his studies at the Talmud Torah and then at the Yeshiva Ketana until he was 15 years old. Shortly before he turned 16, Mordechai started considering studying at Mercaz HaRav. Mercaz HaRav



at that time was a new school started by Rabbi Kook who had grand plans for the school.

According to a publication authored by Natan Ophir, an alumnus of Mercaz HaRav, Rabbi Kook had an ambitious goal for a Central Universal Yeshiva:

*Kook had a universal vision "to organize a yeshiva in Jerusalem for the Jewry of the entire world." It would be similar to the existing yeshivas, but would have a broader program, including Jewish Philosophy, Jewish Ethics, and Jewish History. In addition, an opportunity would be given to those desiring secular training to study outside the yeshiva.*

Rabbi Kook envisioned an academy that would be similar to a graduate school and would provide a competitive alternative to the emerging Hebrew University that was being built on Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem.



*Rabbi Kook*

After years of fundraising efforts, including a trip to the United States, a Central Universal Yeshiva, on the scale Kook was dreaming of, never materialized. However, a more modest version was created that still exists today.

Shortly after Rabbi Kook became the Chief Rabbi of Palestine in 1921, Harry Fischel, a wealthy American Jewish philanthropist, funded the construction of a residence for the new Chief Rabbi. Fischel also financed the building of an adjoining synagogue and Beit Midrash, or Study Hall. This provided a location

for the beginnings of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, the first Hebrew language yeshiva of higher learning in Palestine. The name “Mercaz” referred to “the circle” or “hub” of students learning in the beit midrash adjacent to the Chief Rabbi’s residence. “Mercaz HaRav,” or “The Rabbi’s Center,” was meant to be a temporary designation, a precursor for the Central Universal Yeshiva

In the beginning, according to Natan Ophir, some twenty students would gather in Rabbi Kook’s residence. By 1925, the student body had expanded to fifty-two, and by 1927, Mercaz HaRav had around seventy-five students.

When Mordechai started studying at Mercaz HaRav in 1928, there were likely less than 100 students studying with him.



*Photo of Rabbi Kook lecturing to students  
at Marcaz Ha'Rav in its early days*

Moredechai recounted:

*When I began, the Mercaz HaRav was already considered the Yeshiva of the new yeshuv, the new era. And I came to learn at the Mercaz HaRav and I was there almost four years. It was a big period for me. And I don't say that it was one period because even within this period I had failures and I had achievements. I passed through crises and I had some times that I was very cheerful. I was at Mercaz HaRav between the ages of 16 through 20. And I knew I wanted to become a Rabbi so I knew that my learning there was an achievement because I wanted to know the Torah and I wanted to know as much as possible to be a scholar. But I knew that this was not my last aim.*

During his time at Mercaz HaRav, Mordechai decided to pursue a secular high school degree, to obtain a "matriculation," so he could qualify to study abroad. This fit with Rabbi Kook's allowance for his students to receive secular training as long as it was outside the yeshiva and did not conflict with any of the principles of the yeshiva. Moredechai reflected on how difficult this was to accomplish:

*But how to get a matriculation, this was really a big problem. I devoted myself to learn all day because we had what we called two "sedarim", or sessions, that means the morning sedar or the morning session and the afternoon hours. And that leaves just the evening - what could I achieve in the*

evening? In order to get a matriculation I needed to know six subjects well and then to also know Hebrew. Although I read some literature in Hebrew, I didn't read the new literature that had been written and published. Nevertheless, I needed six subjects. Students that went through secular school had a systematic training and could easily continue and get through the matriculation. But I had never been in a secular school, I never had a systematic training. I had to study History from the very beginning, Mathematics from the very beginning, Hebrew - I had to learn to express myself and to narrate, and how to give a description. It was quite difficult and of course this caused me to be worried.

Though my father always kept telling me "go to private teachers, have the best teachers, you can study yourself." But it was rather difficult and it took me quite a considerable amount of time. To study Mathematics and to study Geography - and I remember the difficulties I had with Geography, it was the most difficult subject for me. But in Hebrew I had a very good teacher, he was also a teacher in the Gymnasia Ivryit, the Hebrew Gymnasium,. And he really taught me how to write and to express myself. And whenever he gave me an essay to write he edited it and rewrote the essay in the same spirit with the same expressions, but he made it a better narrative. And he showed me how to write

*something systematically. And this was a great help for me.*

Mordechai spent four years balancing the work load at Mercaz HaRav during the days and studying secular subjects on his own in the evenings, with the help of tutors.



*Illustration of Mordechai studying  
by himself in the evening*

His first priority was to complete his studies at the yeshiva and receive a “Smicha”, a Rabbinic ordination. When he was approaching the end of his fourth year, he approached Rabbi Kook and explained his situation:

*I explained to Rabbi Kook that I wanted to go abroad to study. So he said instead of*

examining me he would give me three questions to write about. One in "Yisovaid" (which covered the salting of meat), one in "Scheeta" (which covered the slaughter of animals) and one in "Minacha" (which covered meal offerings).

He gave me these three questions and he said "You write your replies and then bring them over to me". It was a hard set of problems and I went home and I compiled not only short answers but also the discussions arguing and analyzing all these questions. And I also went to Reb. Yitzhak Yankif Wechtfuegel and I showed my draft to him and he remarked on it and I made corrections. And I brought it to Rabbi Cook and he went over it immediately. And he sat down and he dictated a letter to be typed which he later signed.

He gave me two letters; one was a real Smicha which is written "Yoreh, Yoreh Yadin Yadin" (this refers to specific levels of rabbinic knowledge and authority being conferred and can be translated as "Instruct? You can Instruct and Judge? You can Judge."), which is the old version which our sages even in the Talmud used to bestow Smicha on students. The other letter was, because I told him I was going abroad, so he wrote a letter to the head of the Yeshiva in London that I could teach youth in Talmud in any Yeshiva, where ever it be. So he gave me these two letters and I left the Yeshiva.

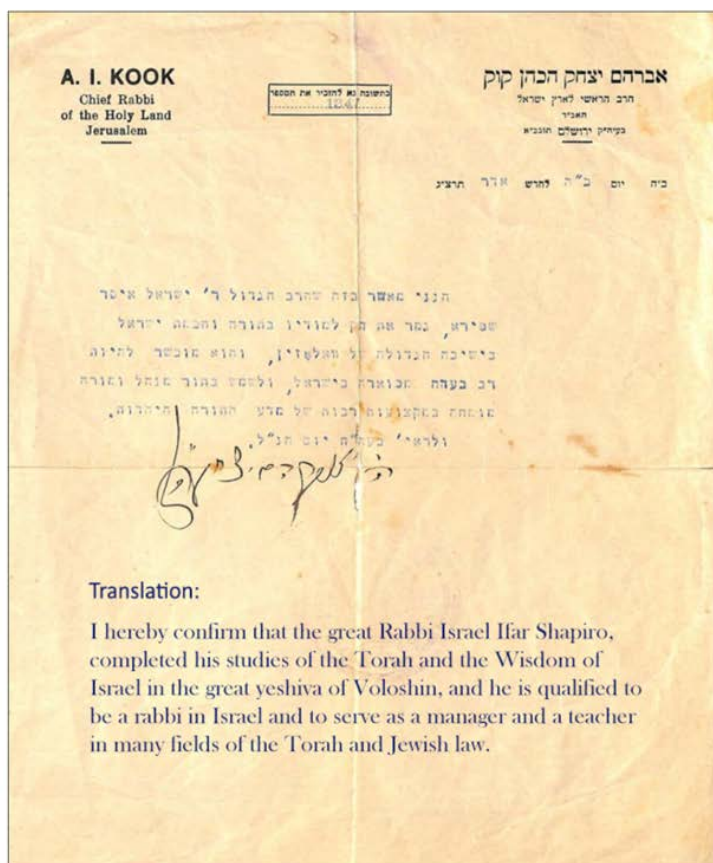
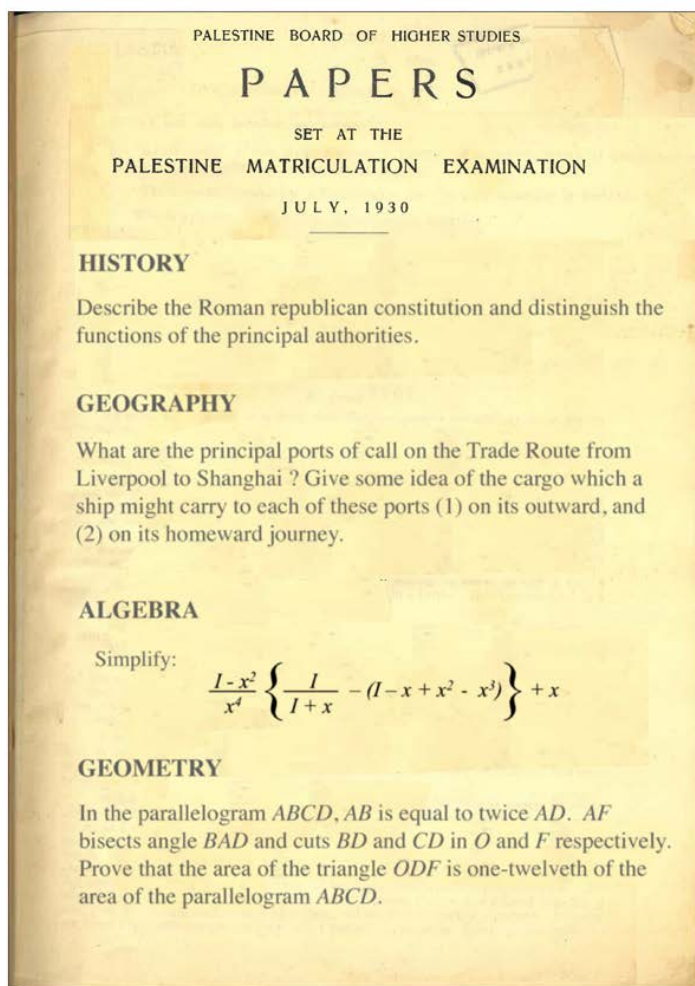


Photo of a typewritten letter by Rabbi Kook in 1932.

With his Smicah in hand, Mordechai turned his attention to completing his matriculation. The Department of Education of British Mandatory Palestine created a formal exam to test the aptitude of





*Example questions from the  
Palestine Matriculation Exam, 1930*

students in a variety of subjects. Upon passing the matriculation exam, students were allowed to matriculate directly to universities in England.

The exam was offered in English, Hebrew and Arabic. The students had to pass tests in six subjects. Three were mandatory: English, Language and Mathematics, while an additional three could be chosen from a variety of other subjects including Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Geography and History. Mordechai finished his preparations, took the test in Jerusalem and was very relieved to pass on his first attempt.

He now prepared to study in London and by the middle of 1933 he left to study there. Mordechai's father Eliyahu was moderately upset that Mordechai was going abroad but was more or less resigned that it was the right thing for Mordechai to do.

However, a year and a half after Mordechai started studying in London, he returned to Jerusalem at his father's request. Per Mordechai:

*My father couldn't stay 'alone', he wanted me back. Though my younger brother Arie, may he live forever, was still living at home and Natan, may he rest in peace, my older brother, was married and still working with my father, there was a kind of friction among themselves. You know sometimes my father would get annoyed and he wanted me to come back. He said that I can complete my studies in Jerusalem, there was a law school and I could continue my studies. So I came back after one and a half years. By then I had passed my intermediate levels and I*

*completed my studies for an LLB through correspondence and took the examination in Jerusalem to be an advocate. I had to do it, I knew my father was attached to me so I came back.*

Shortly after Mordechai returned to Palestine he married Hanna Bermann, the daughter of Nehemiah and Chaya Alta. Nehemiah Bermann was a businessman who, among other efforts, set up and expanded several orange orchards and sold building material. Mordechai and Hanna's daughter Ora was born about two years after they were married.

Mordechai continued his studies in law school in Jerusalem but lived in Tel Aviv with his wife and daughter. At the same time, he joined his father-in-law's business in Tel Aviv called Mann & Bermann, and became a partner. He was successful in the business and dedicated one day a week to attend classes in Jerusalem.

When Mordechai traveled to Jerusalem he also made time to visit his family there. Mordechai remembered his visits:

*I went to see my family and with my father discussed whatever issues he wanted to discuss. I use to come once a week and at that time there were riots and it was very dangerous to go to Jerusalem. I didn't go with my car. I went by bus.*

*Sometimes my father had financial decisions he wanted to talk over with me and sometimes he had specific business tasks with which he asked for help. I helped him whenever I could.*

*Sometimes parents have favorites. I don't deny I was the favorite. I can't deny it, I knew that my father was very attached to me. But sometimes it puts a burden on you. I helped my whole family whenever I could, my brothers and my sisters, and my parents. Whatever I could do for them I did for them. I helped them out and that's that.*



*Photograph of bus on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv route,  
accompanied by an armed British armored car  
~ 1936 - 1939.*

Mordechai finished his law studies in 1938 and was eligible to get a license and start a practice. But soon after he finished his studies, WWII broke out and his

commitments at work stopped him from starting a law practice. Mordechai's company was involved in supply agreements with the British government and the British army and he was the only one in his company that could communicate well with British government officials.

During this time Mordechai managed to sustain his Talmudic studies and published some works. He was particularly interested in comparing Jewish law to other laws.

In 1943 though the war was still going on and though he still had to deal with some of his business commitments, he became licensed as a lawyer and began a law practice. He recounted his thoughts about this period of his life:

*In 1943 I got my law license and I really wanted to change my life. I wanted to give up in business and I wanted to become a lawyer.*

*I had an offer from a big firm in Tel Aviv called Philip Josephs. I had a good friend there. They said that I could join the company and I could start in the law business. I was interested not because I could do better financially, but rather I wanted to practice law so afterwards I could advance in the academic world. Because while I was in business I couldn't do any academic work in law. But circumstances didn't allow me. Our company was very much involved with the British army and supplied wood, for cases, and other imported materials that were very difficult to import and to manufacture. The*

company was very dependent on me, and we had contracts which I could not terminate. I regret it very much. The company gave me a bigger share in the company because they wanted to keep me. Materially I was always satisfied - I had enough but I did not look for material benefit. I wanted to have another sort of life. Then I thought sometimes you cannot accomplish what you want. But this was the fact.

Mordechai was commissioned by the emerging State of Israel to help make some purchases abroad. Levi Eshkol, then at the Sachnute (the Jewish Agency), asked Mordechai to go to England and Czechoslovakia to facilitate purchases for the Army, the State, and for the arriving refugees. Mordechai was in England and Czechoslovakia for four months in 1948, completed his assignment, and came back after the Proclamation of Israeli independence.

Mordechai had a busy life. His responsibilities at work continued to grow. He helped his wife Hanna raise their daughter and continued his visits to his

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A Hebrew advertisement for Mordechai's company  
printed in the Haaretz newspaper in 1955

family in Jerusalem. He also spent time starting and running his law practice.

In addition to all of this, Mordechai also found time to write and publish three books on Talmudic law, compiling and interpreting sets of commentaries from different eras on various legal subjects. These books were intended for advanced Yeshiva students and Rabbi's serving on rabbinical courts or tribunals.

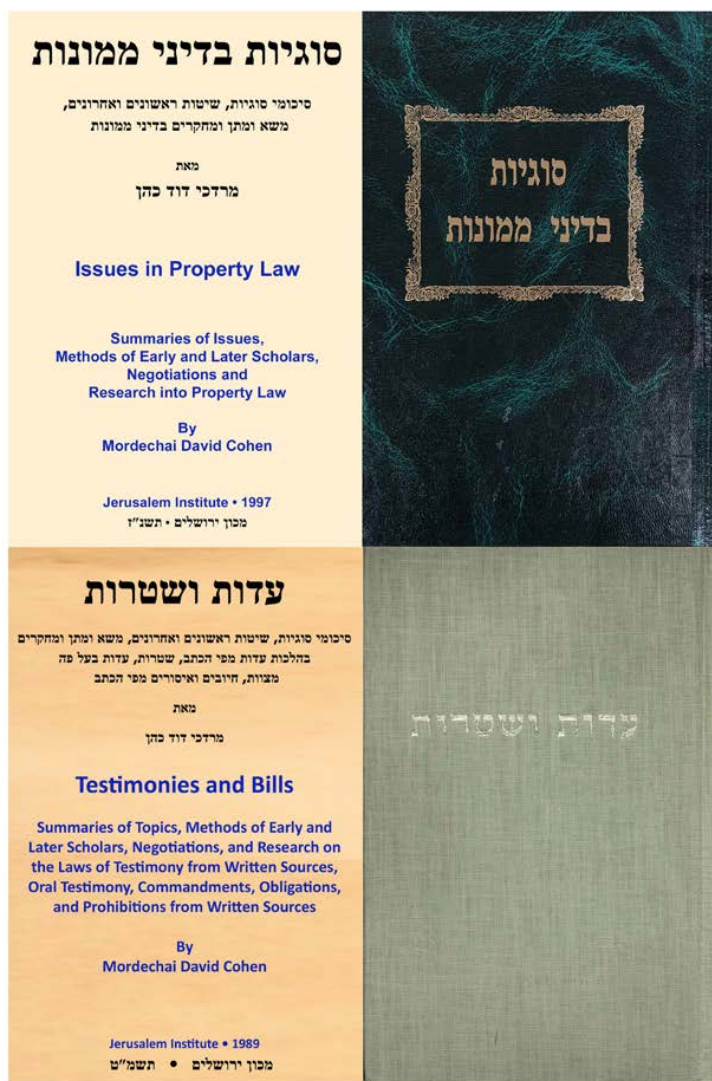
In 1969, Hanna, Mordechai's wife of 34 years passed away. He remarried several years later to Ora Yalin, a woman from a large Jerusalem family similar to his own. Mordechai passed away in 1998.

Long before he passed away, in an interview conducted in 1978, Mordechai made a revealing comment while reflecting about being a Rabbi:

*I had a feeling that I wouldn't be a Rabbi. I didn't want to practice as a Rabbi. Certainly not in Jerusalem, certainly not in Israel. Because they were too, I wouldn't say fanatic, because it is far for me to define these people, I was with them, to say fanatic. But I couldn't confine myself to be a Rabbi in Eretz Yisrael. It was too confining. I knew that I also had to study, to have knowledge of history, of law, and I had to have a systematic scientific training.*

Mordechai was in fact driven by his urge for "systematic scientific training." It started when he was still a teenager, and he found a way to gain a secular high school education while keeping up with rigorous religious studies. And this drive continued throughout his life.





Two of Mordechai's books

Ironically, self-imposed constraints from his business commitments, not religious considerations, held Mordechai back from pursuing an academic legal career.

As Mordechai admitted, sometimes life circumstances create impassable obstacles. Nevertheless, he was able to be an academic in his own way and his scholarly intellect still managed to shine through.



*Photo of Mordechai combined with a photo  
of Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv, near his  
law office*

## Chapter 6:

# A Ticket to Ride

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**E**lissa grew up in a turbulent era: the Turks had just been expelled by the British, Hebrew was displacing Yiddish as the preferred language, Israel was becoming a state and striving to join the modern world. Elissa's story echoes a common theme - leaving behind the old world to join a more modern one.

A formative event for Elissa was moving from a girls Heder, her initial traditional religious school, to a French language school, called the Alliance Israélite Universelle.



*Illustration of young girls like Elissa and her nieces walking to school in Jerusalem in the 1930s*

When Elissa was growing up, education for girls most often focused on preparation for customary domestic and religious roles as wives and mothers rather than on preparation for professional careers. As Elissa's niece Yocheved, Shoshana's daughter, described it:

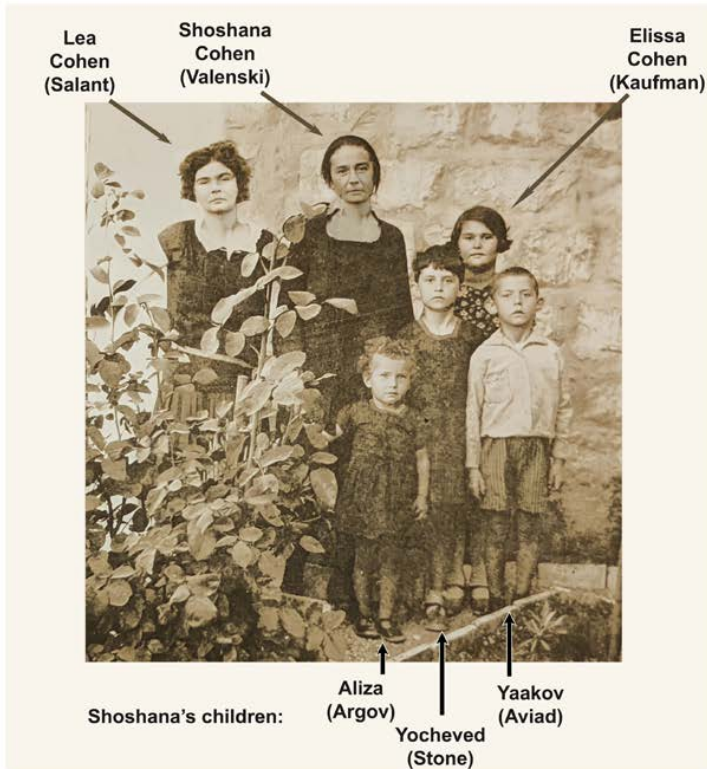
*I think from my mother's perspective (and nearly all devout housewives) life was focused on the Sabbath meal eaten on Friday night. Starting from Sunday, women began to plan next week's shopping and cooking in order to prepare the next Sabbath meal.*

Elissa's family circumstances, specifically her father accepting some secular education for girls, provided her with a remarkable opportunity to break from tradition. Although she came from a lineage of full-time Torah scholars, she was given the chance to study a variety of secular subjects at the Alliance school. Elissa was not the first, nor the last, girl in the family to study secular subjects.

Elissa's older sister Shoshana led the way. In Shoshana's own words:

*Father, may he rest in peace, only wanted his children to learn and learn; and just as he sent his sons to the Torah Heder, he sent me, after I learned prayer and writing letters in Yiddish, to the Landau school. I studied there for several years and even got to know the headmistress - the teacher Landau. Every Thursday the girls would gather in the school hall and garden. Miss Landau read us the Ten Commandments in English. At school we were taught to read Rashi script [Hebrew*

*written in a semi-cursive style] and we also had good Hebrew teachers. In Hebrew, I was a good student because I studied with the Rebitzen (the Rabbi's wife), and the teachers could see that I knew how to pray and more.*



*Photo of Elissa with her two older sisters , Lea and Shoshana, and Shoshana's three children ~1928*

After a few years at the Landau School, Soshana switched to a German-language school called the Lemel School, funded by the German-Jewish philanthropic organization Ezra. In addition to studying German, English, Hebrew and secular subjects, Shoshana was also introduced to cultural activities and learned to play the mandolin and attended plays and musical events.

Lea, Elissa's other sister, likely attended the Lemel school or possibly the Alliance school, as upon graduation she completed the Mizrahi Teachers' Seminary for Women and became a certified teacher.

Elissa, and her two nieces, Aliza and Yocheved who were close to her in age, attended the Alliance school, a few years apart from one another, and had very positive things to say about it.

Aliza said:

*I have talked about the Alliance school extensively in the past, especially about the rich atmosphere I experienced there. Personally, I owe a lot to this school which instilled extensive knowledge and many values in me. I graduated with great knowledge of the French language and culture, which I love very much. English was also taught well, so we went out into the world with a lot of knowledge. As I mentioned on many occasions, it was a "European island" amidst the Israeli reality. I still feel a very deep appreciation for the school.*

Aliza's older sister Yocheved reminisced:



*I spent one year at the Lemel school and then Ima (Mother) took me out and registered me at the Alliance Israélite Universelle - a step for which I bless her to this day. The Alliance was a much less pampered, more overcrowded school. However, the Alliance taught languages! Right at the beginning I was made to copy the date from the blackboard 28 September 1927. I started copying from right to left, naturally, and the teacher, Mdm. Judex caught me half way and corrected me with a "gifle" [Yiddish for a slap or a cuff, often used in a playful context]. I am eternally grateful to Ima who made the crucial move taking us out of a purely Hebrew environment and allowing us to absorb French and English cultures.*



*Illustration of an Alliance teacher lecturing on French grammar*



The Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in 1860 in Paris as an international Jewish organization with the mission of safeguarding human rights for Jews worldwide. Its objectives included promoting self-sufficiency through education and professional development. The organization was successful in establishing French-language schools for Jewish children across the Mediterranean, Iran, and the former Ottoman Empire during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

By 1900, Alliance Israélite Universelle was operating 100 schools with a student population of 26,000. Its greatest efforts were concentrated in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey.

In Jerusalem in the late 1890s, the Alliance organization bought a plot of land between Agripas St. and Jaffa Road in order to build a new school for boys. The building cornerstone was laid in 1898 and the construction of the new building was finished in 1902. In 1906 the Alliance opened a secondary school for girls in Jerusalem across the street at the same location.



*Photo of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school in Jerusalem near Jaffa Road and Machne Yehuda (market)*

The Alliance, as well as the other foreign language schools, such as the Landau school and the Lemel school, initially received push back from the Ashkenazi religious community. Many Ashkenazi rabbis were fiercely opposed to the secular oriented schools and prohibited community members from sending their children to these schools. They expressed their opposition through the use of placards posted in public places declaring these schools would adversely affect traditional Jewish practices and speed up the process of assimilation. Members of the Sephardic community, on the other hand, were more accepting and initially students at the Alliance were mostly Sephardic.

Most relevant to Elissa's father Eliyahu was the view of Chief Rabbi Kook on secular education. According to two Israeli historians, Yehudit Cohen and Yossi Goldstein, Rabbi Kook opposed the worldview of the founders and teachers of the Herzliya Gymnasium, started in 1905 to create a secondary school to teach modern education in Hebrew. However, Rabbi Kook refrained from speaking out against them publicly, preferring a less confrontational approach, optimistically hoping the school founders and students would eventually return to what he regarded as the righteous path. Rabbi Kook's reluctance to publicly oppose modern education likely allowed Eliyahu to choose schools for his daughters, and granddaughters, that offered secular subjects.

At the time, Jewish studies held a prominent place in the Alliance curriculum. Elissa's niece Yocheved outlined the classes she took during her time there:

*The school curriculum was neatly divided into two halves: we did some subjects in Hebrew and some in French. Thus, we had Tanach [Bible], Jewish history, and language in Hebrew, and for some reason we also studied chemistry in Hebrew. French history, language, physics, and math were taught in French.*

Like Yocheved, Elissa loved learning languages and the exposure to modern western world views. Elissa made friends at the Alliance with whom she stayed in



*Elissa with classmates at Alliance ~1930*

touch with throughout her life. As kids, she and her niece Yochevet were also friends, and spent time together, even though Yochevet was a bit younger.

When Elissa was in her teens, her friends influenced her to participate in the activities of the Haganah, the main Jewish underground military organization. Elissa recounted her memories of these times:

*I joined an organization called Tzofim, it's like the Boy Scouts or Girls Scouts. At this time in the Tzofim you had to pledge that you would help with communications by delivering messages. You promise you're going to come whenever they ask you to come, no matter how busy you are, no matter what time. And they would give you a piece of paper with a message on it to deliver somewhere. I remember so well, one particular time, it was a Friday afternoon and I was helping my mother cook for Shabbos. It was about 4:30 and all of sudden my friend Tria arrives at the door with a message for me to deliver.*

*I cannot tell you how anxious I was because it was almost Shabbos and if my father came home and I was not at home, I would be in such big trouble you cannot imagine. But I had to go even though my poor mother started yelling at me not to leave, though she had no idea where I was going. I promised her I would be back before sundown. This particular assignment, I suspect, was just a test to see if I was reliable or not. I made it back in time but I was so worried.*

*You see, my father was firmly against these types of activities for at least two reasons. My father was much more religious*

ALLIANCE ISRAËLITE UNIVERSELLE ÉCOLE DE FILLES JÉRUSALEM		חברת כל ישראל חברים בית-הספר לבנות ירושלים	
EXAMENS		הצחינות	
Année 1935-1936		שנת תרצ"ה	
Nom de l'Elève Esther Pado		שם התלמידה עטרת פדו	
Classe 5 <sup>e</sup> מחלקה			
<b>HÉBREU :</b> Bible	10	עברית :	תנ"ך
Lecture	10	קריאה	
Récitation	10	שירים	
Orthographe	10	הכתבה	
Composition	10	חבור	
Grammaire	10	דקדוק	
Littérature	10	ספרות	
<b>FRANÇAIS :</b> Lecture	10	צרפתית :	קריאה
Récitation	10	שירים	
Orthographe	10	הכתבה	
Composition	10	חבור	
Grammaire	10	דקדוק	
<b>ENGLISH :</b> Reading	10	אנגלית :	קריאה
Recitation	10	שירים	
Dictation	10	הכתבה	
Composition	10	חבור	
Histoire juive	10	קורות העברים	
Histoire générale	10	דברי ימי העמים	
Géographie de la Palestine	10	כתיבת ארץ ישראל	
Géographie générale	10	גאוגרפיה כללית	
Sciences ou Leçons de choses	10	דיוקנות המדע או המכאניקה	
Arithmétique et géométrie	10	חשבון והנמכה	
Dessin	10	ציור	
Calligraphie	10	כתיבת תחם	
Couture et Broderie	10	תפירת וריקמה	
Gymnastique	10	התעמלות	
Chant	10	זמרה	
Tenue des cahiers	10	סדר	
Propreté	10	נקיון	
Travail	10	שקידה	
Conduite	10	התנהגות	
Moyenne	10	הציון הממוצע	
Absences dans l'année 3 jours	10	חגורים במשך השנה	
Observations		הערות	
Le 24 juillet 1936		יום	
L'Institutrice: A. Pado		המנהלת: A. Pado	
La Directrice: A. Pado		המנהל: A. Pado	

Student Report Card from Alliance Girls School 1935-1936



*than secular, so he was naturally against any political kinds of things, especially doing things that could get you in trouble. And also, he felt a girl should not be doing these types of things. So I was always terribly afraid of getting caught by my father.*

*I was also involved with two other similar activities. One was with the Magen David Adom, like the Red Cross. Young girls like me were taught how to watch for suspicious activities from a roof top. I suppose we were on buildings where certain activities, like working with ammunition, were taking place. We were taught how to signal down to others in the building if we saw certain things or people approaching. And the second was taking guns and ammunition in our school bags. The idea was as young girls we would not look suspicious carrying school bags so we were given bags filled with ammunition, I think for these wide-nozzle guns they called Stern guns. And we wore these school bags*



*Illustration of school girls with book bags by an Old City gate*

*and we walked to a particular gate of the Old City at a particular time and we were met by some people who took the bags from us.*

*I had to do these kinds of things, basically helping the Haganah, because it was a necessity at the time for young people to participate. My friends and I felt we just had to do it.*

When Elissa finished the primary grades at Alliance she went on to complete the two-year Alliance commercial course, where she learned shorthand, typing and some bookkeeping skills.



*Photo of Alliance typing class taught as part of the commercial curriculum*

With her secretarial classes completed, Elissa secured her first job as a telephone operator at the Post Office on Jaffa Road where the Jerusalem central telephone exchange was located. In this job she completed connections on a large switchboard for English-speaking callers.

She worked in this job for a few years until a cousin of hers helped her get a job with the British army. Her cousin had started his own pharmacy near the Jaffa Gate and had many British officers as clientele. This cousin introduced her to an officer who helped her apply for a clerical opening at the Schneller Compound, near Mea Shearim. The Schneller Compound was a former German-run orphanage where the British had set up barracks for soldiers and created offices in which army officers worked. Elissa was hired and worked there as an English typist and stenographer for about three years. A requirement to work half days on Saturdays eventually caused her to resign and she found work at a much smaller business, also as a typist.



*Elissa, sitting 1st on left, with other secretaries and British officers, working at the Schneller Compound*



In 1943, Elissa found it necessary to complete a British Mandate Naturalization process, likely to help improve her job prospects. She was officially an Italian citizen because her father had become an Italian citizen after traveling to Italy with his brother in 1910. The naturalization process was a bureaucratic exercise, but it left behind a 16-page application stored in the Israeli National Archives. Among its contents is a beautiful photo of Elissa, which has been colorized and placed on the rear cover of this book.

Throughout her twenties, Elissa had an active social life and continued to socialize with the friends she had made in school.



*Photo of Elissa, who was very athletic in school, shown here with her tennis gear.*

At the age of 27 Elissa was introduced to her future husband, Bernie Kaufman. As older adults, neither Elissa nor Bernie could remember exactly how they were introduced. It could have been through a matchmaker, but more likely it was through one of Elissa's family members. Elissa's father had previously built a second-floor addition onto Bernie's father's house. Bernie was in Jerusalem after serving in the American army during WW II. He was there visiting his father who had relocated to Jerusalem in the 1930s.

Elissa and Bernie dated for 6 months and were married on June 18, 1946. Their first child, Allan, was born on March 8, 1947. Elissa recounted the story that while she was in labor, she had to take a middle-of-the-night walk, hearing sniper fire around her, to the Sadovsky Maternity Hospital, nearly a mile away from their home.



*Photo of Elissa holding Allan, her happy baby, in 1947*

Shortly after Allan was born, Bernie's father died and living conditions in Jerusalem worsened. The British extended curfews in response to extensive rioting and from the house where Elissa and Bernie lived, they could regularly see gunfire streaks and hear rounds of ammunition being fired. One night, around 2:00 am, their house was searched for weapons and Bernie was taken away for a day of interrogation. Elissa and Bernie concluded they would have a better life in the United States, where Bernie's mother and several sisters were living. They left Jerusalem and made plans to stay with Bernie's family in Brooklyn until they could find their own place.

With tickets in hand, they went through a perilous ordeal to get to the Lydda airport. They traveled in a Haganah-run convoy riding in an armored bus laden with hand grenades and guns, passing burned-out cars along the way, until with great relief, they arrived at the airport shortly before their flight.

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<b>TRANSCONTINENTAL &amp; WESTERN AIR INC.</b>					
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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, U. S. A.					
CARRIER: TRANSCONTINENTAL & WESTERN AIR, INC.				TO : NEW YORK	
				FROM : LYDDA	
PASSENGER MANIFEST					
ORIGINATED AT: CAIRO, Egypt.					
DESTINUED TO: NEW YORK, U.S.A. via					
DATE: February 15, 1948.					
FLIGHT NO: 921/15 Lydda, Athens, Rome, Geneva, Paris, Shannon, Gander, Boston.					
DATE: February 15, 1948.					
PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGES					

*Photo of Elissa and Bernie's Flight Manifest to the US*

On February 15, 1948, Elissa, Bernie and Allan boarded a small TWA plane in Lydda, Palestine and flew a seven-stop multi-leg route to LaGuardia Airport in Queens, New York. With seven stops, the long flight could not have been easy, especially with a small infant to care for along the way.

Once settled, Elissa and Bernie found an apartment at 238 Bond Street in Brooklyn and Bernie passed a civil service exam enabling employment with the Board of Education. In 1950, Elissa had her second child, a daughter, who they named Harriet (who as an adult changed her name to Rachel). Bernie's mother was living in Miami Beach, with two of Bernie's sisters. In 1953, they convinced Elissa and Bernie to join them in Florida with their two children.

With the help of one of Bernie's sisters, they bought a house in Hollywood, about 15 miles North of Miami Beach, where their third son, Howard was born in 1954. Bernie owned and managed a toy store in Miami Beach, for eight years and then sold it as business was declining. He then started selling real estate, a plentiful commodity during South Florida's prolonged expansion.

Elissa began to work part-time once the children were in elementary school. Though math was Elissa's least favorite subject in Alliance, to her great surprise, she became a cashier and enjoyed working at several different restaurants in hotels around Hollywood.

Hollywood was a small town with a population of about 35,000 in 1960 and the main industry was tourism in the winter months. The main cultural link Elissa and Bernie had to the town was through a small Conservative synagogue called Temple Beth Sholem, built in 1953 shortly before they arrived. They sent all

three children to Hebrew school there and they attended services on the High Holidays and on Friday nights, when Bernie sang in the choir.



*Postcard showing Temple Beth Sholem built in 1953*

The Alliance school opened the door for Elissa to the world outside of Jerusalem. It was the Alliance school which gave her English fluency, and practical skills to function effectively and adapt to different environments, including the radically unfamiliar terrain of South Florida. The school was also symbolic of the blend of religious and secular thinking that characterized Elissa's life, a blending of old with new which exemplified her path. Not only did she ably raise three children, but she started working outside of the home when her kids were still young. She maintained a strong religious and Israeli identity, attending

synagogue and having several close Israeli friends. She had a strong work ethic and enjoyed her jobs which allowed her to socialize by meeting and conversing with a range of interesting people.

Elissa's Alliance education and the skills she developed there provided her with a ticket to ride into a world of modern thinking and living.



*Multi-leg route taken by Elissa, Bernie and their new born son, from Lydda to New York and subsequent overland route to Hollywood, Florida*





## Epilogue

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**E**lissa Cohen was born in Alexandria Egypt in 1918, when her family was exiled from Turkish-governed Palestine. I was born in Hollywood, Florida in 1954, when Dwight D. Eisenhower was President of the United States.

The physical route connecting Alexandria and Hollywood is clear, but the social and cultural voyage between them remains challenging to grasp, let alone describe.

There is not a single answer to how this multifaceted voyage of place and modernization occurred. It was the combination of deliberate decisions, opportunity, access to education, consequences of war and the influence of circumstance.

Exploring Elissa's story and the stories of other family members illuminates a slice of history, providing valuable insights from their life journeys.

When Elissa's family was exiled to Egypt, her father swallowed his pride and hustled, in the good sense of the word, as a street vendor, to support his family.

Elissa's brother Joe bravely immigrated to the United States by himself. He landed on his feet by virtue of his own drive and determination, opportunities that came his way, and help from an aid agency that is still providing assistance to immigrants today, 100 years later.

As a woman coming from a traditional household, Elissa experienced the transformative power of education, which opened doors to languages, skills,

knowledge, cultures and values that would have otherwise remained beyond her reach.

Family members pursued purposeful life journeys during uncertain times. For example, Elissa's brother Mordechai determinedly and independently acquired knowledge in an impressive range of secular subjects, to complement his religious training, with few role models or peers to guide him in achieving his ambitious goal.

When Elissa hop-scotched her way across Europe to the United States with her husband and new-born son, eventually settling down in Hollywood, Florida, she was powered by generations of family struggles, hardships, and successes that helped shape her own life's path. Taking a glimpse of this family history helps to paint portraits of a family's journey.



*Photo of Elissa with her husband Bernie and three children in Hollywood, Florida in 1979*





## About the Author

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*Howard B. Kaufman*

Elissa's youngest child, Howie, attended Hollywood Central Elementary School and completed his Bar Mitzvah at Temple Beth Sholem in Hollywood, Florida. A scholarship enabled him to attend high school at Saint Andrew's School for Boys, an Episcopalian prep school in Boca Raton, Florida.

After high school he attended a 1-year program at the Hebrew University at the Mount Scopus campus in Jerusalem. During his time in Jerusalem, he would visit his grandmother (Alta Devorah), who lived nearby. Though they did not share fluency in a common language, Howie was able to glean small pieces of family history from their fragmented conversations.

Upon his return to the States, Howie completed undergraduate studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, majoring in Physics.

After graduation he worked for five years as a Laser Field Service Engineer for Spectra-Physics, a Silicon Valley company manufacturing laser systems. He traveled domestically and internationally installing, repairing and instructing scientists and engineers on the use of lasers.



*Photo of Howie instructing scientists at the  
Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, China on the use  
of a ring dye-laser in 1979*

Howie returned to school and earned an MBA in 1985 from the Yale School of Organization and Management. This led to a career in technology management.

In 2014, Howie became the Founding CEO of PapGene, Inc., a biotech start-up company which

developed tests to uncover early-stage cancers by detecting mutant DNA fragments in blood. Howie exited the company when it was acquired in 2019 and began his semi-retirement.

He lives with his wife Janet in Newton, Massachusetts and they have two adult sons, Alex and Daniel, who live and work on the East Coast.




*Photo of Howie with his wife and their two sons in 2022*

While various “Technology Transfers” have been a mainstay in Howie’s professional career, the transfer of family history, and the lessons learned from it, have been an important element of his personal life.





# Appendix

 <b>The Montefiore Endowment</b> Preserving and developing the legacy of Sir Moses Montefiore				
<a href="#">HOME</a>	<a href="#">LATEST NEWS</a>	<a href="#">THE ENDOWMENT ▾</a>	<a href="#">THE COLLEGE ▾</a>	<a href="#">THE COLLECTIONS ▾</a>
<a href="#">CENSUSES ▾</a>	<a href="#">SIR MOSES ▾</a>	<a href="#">RAMSGATE ▾</a>	<a href="#">CONTACT</a>	
Name	Census Year	Kollel	Details	
<b>Yehuda Leib Cohen</b>	1849	<u>Prushim</u>	Age: 55   Status: Married   Name: Feiga (wife) Birth place: Brest, Belarus   Occupation: Torah scholar	
	1855	Prushim	Age: 64   Status: Married   Name: Feiga (wife) Birth place: Brest, Belarus <u>Year of Arrival: 1847</u> Occupation: Makes time for the study of Torah	
<b>Mordekhai David Cohen</b>	1849	Prushim	Age: 30   Status: Married   Name: Haya Eidel (wife) Name: Yosef   Birth place: Brest, Belarus Occupation: Torah scholar	
	1855	Prushim	Age: 29   Status: Married   Name: Haya (wife) Name: Yosef (son age 11)   Name: Pesah (son age 1) Birth place: Brest, Belarus <u>Year of Arrival: 1847</u> Occupation: Studies Torah as much as he can	
	1866	Grodno	Age: 40   Status: Married   Name: Haya Adel (wife) Birth place: Brest, Belarus <u>Year of Arrival: 1860</u> Occupation: Sells drinks	
	1875	Grodno	Age: 45   Status: Married   Name: Haya (wife) Birth place: Brest, Belarus <u>Year of Arrival: 1850</u> Occupation: Sells wine and brandy also the Kolel fund	
<b>Yosef Cohen</b>	1866	Grodno	Age: 20   Status: Married   Name: Sara (wife) Name: Feiga (daughter age 1) <u>Year of Arrival: 1848</u> Birth place: Brest, Belarus   Occupation: Studies Torah	
	1875	Grodno	Age: 30   Status: Married   Name: Sara (wife) Name: Abraham (son)   Name: Hanna Debora (daughter) Birth place: Brest, Belarus <u>Year of Arrival: 1854</u> Occupation: Studies Torah, makes living from Kolel fund	

*From the Montefiore Censuses (1839 - 1875)  
showing arrival dates to Jerusalem and  
the Kolllels (funding groups) of Elissa's ancestors*



*Location of the graves of Elissa's family members in the Mount of Olives Cemetery in Jerusalem*





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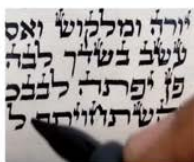
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through old photographs, 1900-1935  
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Dreamstime image 52229979:  
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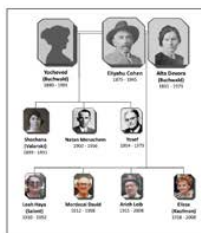
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"Sunny 2nd-floor home office, with typewriter, building construction manager, in 1925, in Jerusalem, fine details, realistic photograph --ar 3:2 --v 4", as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 4 with modifications by Howie Kaufman.

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“A walking religious Jewish man, facing the camera, wearing a tweed sports coat leading a donkey in Jerusalem in 1910, fine detail, hyperrealistic photo --ar 3:2 --v 4”, as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 4 with modifications by Howie Kaufman.



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## Chapter 4:

## Into the Welcome Arms of HTAS



“A young man with a cap, beard, wire rim glasses who is smiling and disembarking from a ship in 1924 --v 5.1 --ar 3:2”- Blended with photo image of Joe Cohen circa 1972, as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 5.1.



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## Chapter 5: An Old Hasidic Tale



“A dramatic cinematic scene of an old jewish man with contemplative eyes and a satisfied expression, a beard, side curls and a Hasidic hat, looking up towards some subtle rays of sunlight streaming down from the sky, with his back to the camera, looking up, answering questions to the lord about his life, wide angle view, bright background, beautiful hyperrealistic photographic style --ar 3:2” --as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 5.1



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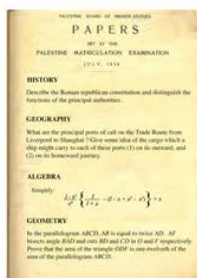


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## Chapter 6: *A Ticket to Ride*



“Two young school girls carrying books with short black curly hair in 1928 walking down Jaffa road in Jerusalem”, blended with two photos of Jaffa Rd. circa 1930, as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 5.1



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Elissa C. Kaufman, interview. Conducted by Howie Kaufman. Unpublished, Hollywood, Florida, 1978, Audio cassette.



Photo from Elissa Kaufman's personal photo collection.



"Color image of three school girls in uniforms with backpacks walking next to the Jaffa gate of the old city in Jerusalem in 1932", blended with photo of Jaffa Gate, circa 1930, as prompted by Howie Kaufman. Art work by Midjourney Version 5.1



Leçon de sténo-dactylo  
<https://www.bibliotheque-numerique-aiu.org/en/records/item/8616-lecon-de-steno-dactylo?offset=9>  
Accessed Oct. 3, 2023.



Photo from Elissa Kaufman's personal photo collection.



Photo from Elissa Kaufman's personal photo collection.



Photo from Elissa Kaufman's personal photo collection.



Arrival Manifest, New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists 1820-1957 for Bernard Kaufman,, Accessed via ancestry.com. Merged with TWA ticket from 1948.



Post card of Temple Beth Sholem  
<https://synagoguesofthesouth.cofc.edu/synagogues/hollywood-fl-temple-beth-sholem-1953/>  
Accessed Oct. 3, 2023.



Map of route taken, custom map created using Snazzymaps.com and Photoshop.

## *Epilogue*



Photo from Howie Kaufman's personal photo collection.

## *About the Author*



Photo from Howie Kaufman's personal photo collection.



Photo from Howie Kaufman's personal photo collection.



Photo from Howie Kaufman's personal photo collection.

## Appendix

[illegible]

The Montefiore Censuses database  
<https://www.montefiorecensuses.org/>  
 Accessed Oct. 30, 2022.



Map of Mt. of Olives Cemetery with  
grave locations from:  
<https://mountofolives.co.il/en/>



Elissa at the age of 25